ARCHETYPAL ELEMENTS IN THE POETRY OF SYLVIA PLATH

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Abstract

Jungian psychology underpins much of this thesis, specifically the central concept of that psychology, the process of individuation. Sylvia Plath's work and thought is responsive to Jungian analysis, and her poetry is examined within this framework, utilisation being made of her prose writings as additional evidence of that responsiveness. The hypothesis is that the process of individuation can be traced through the use of certain archetypal elements in her literary *oeuvre*, and that she used that *oeuvre* as a method of constructing her identity.

As an introduction, the position of the woman writer within a male-dominated society and its effect on Plath's work is discussed, together with her search for identity as exemplified in her use of the subjective speaker. Consideration is given to Plath's probable literary sources for the archetypal elements of stone, of water, and of rebirth, such sources being Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman', Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and certain of Plato's works, texts which are found to have exerted a profound influence on the poet. Plath's use and development of these archetypal elements is traced throughout her work, attention being paid to the interpretation she placed on such elements. In addition to his psychological writings, Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, is a source of reference since the archetypal elements are evident in that work. Detailed analysis is undertaken on two long poetic sequences, 'Poem for a Birthday' and the bee poems: both are held to be significant, not only in Plath's poetic development, but also as evidence of her passage through individuation: these sequences illustrate Plath's use of the theme of rebirth. Finally, specific aspects of Jungian symbolism are examined, and rebirth is considered in a wider context. Plath's suicide is discussed in the Epilogue.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

Bell	*The Bell Jar* London: Faber & Faber, 1963
Dreams	*Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams and other prose writings* London: Faber & Faber, 1977
Journals	*The Journals of Sylvia Plath* Ted Hughes, Consulting Editor and Frances McCullough, Editor New York: Ballantine Books, 1983
Letters	*Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963* Selected and Edited with Commentary by Aurelia Schober Plath London: Faber & Faber, 1976
Poems	*Collected Poems* Edited by Ted Hughes London: Faber & Faber, 1981

ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

'Psychology and the study of art will always have to turn to one another for help, and the one will not invalidate the other.' (Jung 1941, p. 177) This is part of Jung's introduction to his essay 'Psychology and Literature'; Langbaum, in his discussion of 'complete criticism' argues that it 'is legitimate . . . to use literature as a source for studying the nature of the creative process and thus of the mind.' (Langbaum 1970, p. 16). This conjoining of psychology and literature is part of the foundation of my thesis. In examining Sylvia Plath's literary texts I endeavour to trace some of the mental processes involved in the creation of those texts, and as a theoretical base, I directed my attention towards the central concept of Jung's psychology, 'the process of individuation' (Jung 1963, p. 200), a process of maturation. I came to perceive, through my study of Jung's writings, that Plath's use of certain imagery, specifically images of stone and of water, corresponded to similar images which occurred in his patients' dreams and drawings. A reading of his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, wherein Jung himself uses such images, reinforced my belief in the possibility of using a Jungian model to interpret Plath's texts.

Jung discusses the process of individuation in Part Two of *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Volume 7 of the Collected Works,[1] and offers the following definition:

> Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as "individuality" embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as "coming to selfhood" or "self-realization." (Jung 7, p. 171)

There are a number of assumptions contained within this quotation: that there is a single self to be discovered; that each individual is unique; that the process of individuation can lead to self-discovery. I return to the matter of assumptions in a later section of this chapter, but offer the above in order that some understanding of individuation may be gained. I discuss Jung's theories in greater detail in the relevant chapters.

For Jung, the process of individuation is a natural transformation involving a 'rebirth' of the individual. In his essay 'The Psychology of Rebirth' (Jung 9, Part 1, pp. 116 - 134) he discusses two groups of transformation experience, 'that of the transcendence of life, and that of one's own transformation.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 117) Under this latter experience, among others, he lists that of natural transformation (individuation) (Jung *ibid.* p. 130), of which he writes:

> . . . in addition to the technical processes of transformation [discussed earlier] there are also natural transformations. All ideas of rebirth are founded on this fact. (Jung *ibid.* p. 130)

To engage in the process of individuation is, in part, to seek a rebirth of oneself. Of one particular case study, Jung notes:

> . . . there was a long-drawn-out process of inner transformation and rebirth into another being. This "other being" is the other person in ourselves--that larger and

> greater personality maturing within us . . . (Jung *ibid.* p. 131)

Jung uses the term 'collective unconscious' to denote a layer of the unconscious which 'is not individual but universal' (Jung *ibid.* p. 3) and whereas the contents of the personal unconscious 'constitute the personal and private side of psychic life', the contents of the collective unconscious 'are known as *archetypes.*' (Jung *ibid.* p. 4) I introduce these terms at this point because images of stone and of water are, in Jung's *schema*, archetypal images, as is the theme of rebirth. I discuss these archetypal elements in greater detail in the relevant chapters.

I believe it is possible to trace Sylvia Plath's engagement in the natural process of maturation through her use of the theme of rebirth in her work, and to trace her affinity with Jungian thought through her use of images of the stone and of water, together with the theme of rebirth.

Synopsis of Chapters

In this introductory chapter, I consider the effect certain editing strategies have produced on Plath's *oeuvre*; I lead into a discussion of some of the aspects of male dominance in Western culture, how they affect her writing and our perception of her work, together with, as noted above, a discussion of the Jungian framework, and a feminist critique of this. I subsequently examine two issues which are closely linked to each other, that

of Plath's search for identity as it can be discerned in her writings, and the nature of the I-speaker in the *oeuvre*.

In Chapter Two, 'Influential Texts', I examine the important influence of certain texts on Plath's work; these texts are: Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman', which Plath's mother read to her as a child (*Dreams*, p. 118), *The Tempest*, a performance of which she was taken to as a young girl (*Letters*, p. 31), and certain of Plato's texts which Plath studied when at Cambridge (*Letters*, p. 228). I show the manner in which these texts, through the use of the stone and water imagery, and the theme of rebirth which occur therein, appear to be the source of at least one particular poem.

As I noted earlier, images of both the stone and water occur in connection with the maturation process; in Chapter Three, 'Images of Stone', I examine such imagery in Plath's *oeuvre*, and the manner in which her interpretation of it developed as her life experiences altered her perception of such an image.

In Chapter Four, 'Images of Water', I consider this imagery, placing reliance on the Jungian interpretation of such symbolism. I examine the manner in which Plath develops this image, and the symbolic meaning it embodied for her.

I have already noted that individuation is a maturation process, the individual's personal psychic development. In Chapters Five and Six, 'Rebirth I' and 'Rebirth II', I examine the theme of rebirth as it occurs throughout Plath's *oeuvre*, analysing in detail 'Poem for a Birthday' in Chapter Five, and the series of

bee poems in Chapter Six; both these sequences are of significance in relation to this theme.

In the concluding chapter I discuss some aspects of the symbolism contained within a Jungian model, and whether such imagery is applicable to women's writing. I examine the rebirth in a wider context, and my concluding remarks concern Plath's suicide.

The Poetry

We, the readers of Sylvia Plath, are constrained in our perception of her writing and of her as an individual by members of her family; this is a limiting factor, and warrants discussion. Ted Hughes has suggested the division of her poems into three phases (see Appendix 1). His comments are pertinent. Of the section called Juvenilia he notes: 'From this whole pre-1956 period, I have selected what seem to be the best . . .' (*Poems*, p. 16); as there are no other stated criteria, we can only assume that the selection is based on his personal assessment of 'best'. Plath herself rejected her early work:

> I've discarded all that I wrote before two years ago and am tempted to publish a book of juvenilia under a pseudonym . . . (*Letters*, p. 347, written July 1958)

She did not wish to acknowledge the work as her own, but considered it had some merit since she was prepared to publish. Hughes comments that Plath 'would certainly never have republished' these early poems (*Poems*, p. 16): clearly his understanding of Plath in relation to her work at this point is

questionable. Plath's comment above supports the end of 1955 as an appropriate cut-off point for this work; however, to publish only a selection of these poems, such a selection having been made without acknowledged criteria other than personal evaluation, presents the reader with an edited version of the artist's work. Hughes suggests this early work may be of interest only to 'specialists' (*ibid.*): perhaps readers should be permitted to make their own judgement as to its relevance.

Hughes suggests that the second phase 'falls between early 1956 and late 1960' (*ibid.*); *The Colossus* contains work written to the end of 1959 (see Appendix 2) and in a broadcast in 1962 Plath commented that the poems of this first collection 'in fact, quite privately, bore me.' (Orr 1966, p. 170). She appears to consider at this point--the broadcast was transmitted in 1962--that these poems formed part of her past beyond which she had progressed both personally and creatively. I suggest that a more logical division would be the end of 1959, a time when Plath and Hughes returned to England. Hughes comments in relation to this phase that at each move they made 'she seemed to shed a style.' (*Poems*, p. 16) This slightly earlier division would support both Plath's and Hughes' comments. The third phase of her work then commences at the beginning of 1960, rather than September of that year, as Hughes proposes. He does not differentiate between the work which was included in *Ariel* and the new poetry written during 1963 despite his comment that Plath herself 'recognizing the different inspiration of these new pieces, regarded them as

the beginnings of a third book.' (*Poems*, p. 15) On this basis, I suggest that these final poems should be considered as a fourth phase in her writing career.

Her journals for this entire period are missing, a point I discuss later in this chapter. Her letters express, during the early part of 1960, some of the problems attendant on the move to England: 'I have gone through a very homesick and weary period' (*Letters*, p. 362); 'those dreary first weeks in London' (*Letters*, p. 365). Her daughter was born in April and by May, Plath was coming to understand the limitations placed on her by a child and other housewifely cares:

> The baby's feedings and keeping the house clean, cooking, and taking care of Ted's voluminous mail, plus my own, have driven me so I care only for carving out hours where I can start on my own writing. (*Letters*, p. 384)

Later in the year she was admitting to her mother her writing difficulties: 'I am at the depressing, painful stage of trying to start writing after a long spell of silence' (*Letters*, p. 386); she 'had little energy for writing in anything but my diary and a few light poems' (*Letters*, p. 391). It is clear that she was still presenting herself to her mother--and perhaps to herself--as the perfect wife: her one aim was 'to keep Ted writing full-time' (*Letters*, p. 389). The socialisation process to which she had been subjected was to cause great conflict for her.

In summary, I agree the division into the first phase, to include all poems prior to 1956; I suggest the second phase encompasses all poems to the end of 1959; the third phase, all poems to the

end of 1962, and the fourth phase, the final 1963 poems. In September 1955 Plath moved to Cambridge, a logical conclusion to juvenilia and the beginning of phase two; in 1960 she and Hughes returned to London from America, the beginning of phase three; and in December 1962 she moved to Yeats' house in London, the beginning of phase four.

Of particular concern is *the published* version of *Ariel* which differs considerably from that which Plath herself had composed (see Appendix 3); Hughes notes that by Christmas 1962 the book which was to become her second collection 'lay completed, the poems carefully ordered.'[2] In Plath's scheme, the collection begins with 'Morning Song'--the opening word is 'love'--and ends with 'Wintering'--the closing word is 'spring', a positive statement of which she was conscious, as Hughes notes (*Poems*, pp. 14-15). 'Wintering' and 'spring' suggest the cyclic nature of life and experience, the inevitability of the movement of the seasons, perhaps indicating the inevitability, for Plath, of the rebirth process. Hughes admits that 'some of the more personally aggressive poems from 1962' were omitted from his version (*ibid.* p. 15), although he does not take responsibility for this decision, rather responsibility appears to lie with the collection itself: his use of 'It incorporated . . .' and 'It omitted . . .' (*ibid.*), suggests that he is aware of a possible source of criticism. He notes that other poems, which he does not specify, might have been omitted 'if she had not already published them herself in magazines' (*ibid.*). He also includes a

number of poems which Plath had excluded: from the dates of the poems listed in *Collected Poems*, 'Death & Co.' is the final poem which Plath included in her scheme (see Appendix 4); since Hughes notes that by Christmas 1962, her version was complete (see note [2] above), we can assume that the poems Plath wrote in the final weeks of 1962 were not, in her view, book material. Hughes saw fit to include in the published version two poems from 1962 and one from 1960, together with a selection of the final poems written in 1963 (see Appendix 5). Not only did he amend the order, he amended the content of *Ariel* and thus presented to the world a modified version of Sylvia Plath's work. Anne Stevenson speculates that since *The Colossus* underwent a number of revisions of title and form, it is possible *Ariel* would have been similarly altered. (Stevenson 1989, p. 277n)

Plath considered these final poems as part of a new collection, a development of which Hughes was aware: he noted Plath's recognition of the value of these poems (*Poems*, p. 15); it would perhaps have been more appropriate to publish them as a separate and complete section. We should also be aware that there are no published poems for the last week of her life; it was during the previous nine days that all the final poems were written, the last poem 'Edge' being dated 5 February 1963. She died one week later. Since we do not have the journals for this period although they originally existed 'to within three days of her death' (*Journals*, p. xv), we can only speculate on her reaction to the creative outpouring which preceded her death.

It is in the final sequence of poems in each collection that I am particularly interested. Plath concluded *Ariel* with the bee poems, and was thus paralleling *The Colossus*, which closed with 'Poem for a Birthday', the final word of which is 'new'. Both sequences focus on rebirth. By altering the closure of *Ariel*--Hughes added a selection of the 1963 poems and omitted 'The Swarm',--the parallelism is lost, as is the sense of hope which was engendered by 'new' at the closure of *The Colossus* and which would have been repeated by 'spring' at the closure of *Ariel*.

To summarise the foregoing, we, Sylvia Plath readers, are presented with a partial portrait of the artist through the editing techniques employed on her prose writings by both her mother and her estranged husband. A further distortion is achieved by an alteration of the ordering of Plath's second collection of poems: chronologically, it was this distortion which preceded the prose writings. We can only speculate that there is a link between the omission of certain poems from *Ariel*, although some of these omissions were published at a later date (see Appendices 3 and 5), and the editing out of certain passages from the prose writings, passages which may have diminished the perception of the poet held by the editors, who wished to impose on Plath readers their own perception without such diminution.

The Prose Writings

Aurelia Plath edited *Letters Home*, and, not unnaturally, in her Introduction to that volume sought to explain and exonerate her own actions towards her daughter. Hughes, in his Introduction to the second edition of *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams and other prose writings* notes that the manuscript of a novel commenced after *The Bell Jar* 'disappeared somewhere around 1970' (*Dreams*, p. 11). Of Plath's journal, he notes :

> Much of this journal either describes people still alive or is very private to her. How much of it ought to be published is not easy to decide. Her description of neighbours and friends and daily happenings is mostly too personal, her criticisms frequently unjust. (*Dreams*, p. 13)

It would seem we are being presented with an image of the poet through others' perceptions of her and her work. Wagner-Martin comments:

> At the estate's mandate, one group of Plath's papers at Smith has been sealed until the year 2013; another is closed until after the deaths of both her mother and her younger brother. Publication of the Plath materials in these libraries is controlled by Ted Hughes, Plath's husband, from whom she was estranged at the time of her suicide. (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 13)

We do not yet have access to all Plath's writings and it is clear from the above, a further twenty years must elapse before additional material is made available.

Hughes co-edited *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* with Frances McCullough; in the Foreword to that text he notes:

> The journals exist in an assortment of notebooks and bunches of loose sheets. This selection contains perhaps a third of the whole bulk, which is now in The Neilson Library at Smith College. Two more notebooks survived for a while, maroon-backed ledgers like the '57 - '59 volume, and continued the record from late '59 to within three days of

> her death. The last of these contained entries for several months, and I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The other disappeared. (*Journals*, p. xv)

The journals, which would cover some of the most formative years of her life, have been destroyed and this act was perpetrated by a writer. Plath scholars have lost over three years' evidence of the poet's thought processes. It seems strange that, if we take the Hughes quotation above in conjunction with the Wagner-Martin passage also quoted above, one group of papers have been destroyed while a further group, which may be equally damaging to others, have been stored for later release.

Frances McCullough, in the Editor's Note to the *Journals*, outlines the guidelines by which cuts were made:

> We have tried, in the cutting of the work, to stick to a few basic principles: to include *what seem to us* the most important elements relating to her work, her inner life, and her valiant struggle to find herself and her voice. . . . There are quite a few nasty bits missing--Plath had a very sharp tongue and tended to use it on nearly everybody, even people of whom she was inordinately fond . . . So, some of the more devastating comments are missing . . . (*Journals*, p. xii, my italics)

As with the Hughes' selection of the juvenilia, the criterion appears to be personal evaluation. Every action is being taken in order to protect the 'good' name of Sylvia Plath and to present her, through the published letters, as 'perfect' daughter, wife and mother, however that may be defined, and through the published journals, as 'perfect' writer, however *that* may be defined. Any writing which might interfere with the editors' perceptions of Plath is suppressed or destroyed.

McCullough notes accurately in the above passage, that Plath sought herself: her writings, prose and poetry, are, at least in part, a record of her inner journey.

My aim in the discussion thus far has been to demonstrate how we are constrained in our perceptions of the writer and her work. If we extend this, Plath herself is constrained by these editing techniques, specifically, she is constrained in her death by the male in the same manner that she perceived herself to be constrained in her life. No doubt, a greater part of the conflict which she sought to resolve during her life was the difficulty of maintaining a belief in the supremacy of the male, a belief instilled in her through her mother, with her own inclinations. As Macpherson points out:

> What is immediately striking about Sylvia Plath's journals is the clarity with which she at age 18 saw and criticized the post-war ideology of femininity . . . (Macpherson 1983, p. 8)

For Macpherson, it is frightening to witness 'Plath's continuing to play by these rules after having figured out the falseness and cruelty of the game.' (*ibid.* p. 9) Plath's inner exploration was in part an endeavour to reconcile these two opposing elements, her socialised belief of the dominance of the male, and therefore the submission of the female to this dominance, and her instinctual belief that the socialised creed was insufficient:

> God, is this all it is, the ricocheting down the corridor of laughter and tears? of self-worship and self-loathing? of glory and disgust? (*Journals*, p. 13)

Plath and Patriarchy

It is, at this point, relevant to consider Plath's background because of its formative effect on her thinking and writing; she acknowledged the constraining nature of this background for women:

> And yet does it not all come again to the fact that it is a man's world? . . . Why should [women] be relegated to the position of custodian of emotions, watcher of the infants, feeder of soul, body and pride of man? Being born a woman is my awful tragedy. From the moment I was conceived I was doomed to sprout breasts and ovaries rather than penis and scrotum; to have my whole circle of action, thought and feeling rigidly circumscribed by my inescapable femininity. (*Journals*, pp. 29-30)

Plath here reveals her awareness of Freudian theory of biological determinism.[3] Later feminist thinking recognises the cultural restraints imposed on women by men as being of equal, if not greater, importance. She sees her femininity as a limitation; this is a patriarchal perception, and one she would have absorbed through her education, but more particularly through her home life. Her mother comments:

> . . . I yielded to my husband's wish that I become a full-time home-maker. (*Letters*, p. 10)
>
> I was totally imbued with the desire to be a good wife and mother. (*ibid.*)
>
> I would simply have to become more submissive, although it was not my nature to be so. (*ibid.* p. 13)
>
> . . .I cooked, mended and did what work I had on hand for my husband--abstracting material to update his lectures, correcting German quizzes, and attending to his correspondence. (*ibid.* p. 18)

Her mother demonstrated to her daughter that to be female was to be subservient to the male. Aurelia Plath does not appear to

have considered any alternative action at that time, and no doubt this was a profound influence on Plath's view of herself which depended in large measure on the male perception of woman, a fact of which she may not have been aware. Demaris Wehr, a scholar of the psychology of religion comments:

> Patriarchal women are tacitly and explicitly discouraged from gratifying their own needs or seeking fulfillment of their own desires. In the face of such deprivation--furthered by psychologies and theologies that have defined women's fulfillment in terms of their service to others--many women in patriarchy lack a sense of themselves as persons, or agents, in their own right. (Wehr 1988, p. 101)

This description fits both Sylvia Plath and her mother.

Adrienne Rich, a contemporary American poet whose career Plath watched closely-- 'she's the girl whose poetry I've followed from her first publication' (*Letters*, p. 339)--wrote that she 'became a mother in the family-centered, consumer-oriented, Freudian-American world of the 1950's' (Rich 1976, p. 25). This is an apt summary of the culture and a statement which could equally be applied to Plath, who grew up in a 'peculiar temporal and social context . . . the fifties, New England, the middle class.' (Juhasz 1976, p. 88). Plath's formative years were spent in an America where the stereotypic white, middle-class girl was conformist, eager to be recognised as a college girl and whose ideal was 'an understated, studied informality that suggested warmth and approachabilility.'[4]

In the above discussion I aim to show some of the sources of Plath's apparent belief in the rightness of male dominance, which she expressed:

> I am, at bottom, simple, credulous, feminine and loving to be mastered, cared for-- (*Journals*, p. 212, written in 1958)

Later she countered this with:

> Dangerous to be so close to Ted day in day out. I have no life separate from his, am likely to become a mere accessory. Important to take German lessons, go out on my own, think, work on my own. Lead separate lives. (*Journals*, p. 326, written in 1959)

The conflict here lies in a need to be 'mastered' and hence to be submissive, yet to achieve an independence from the male dominator, to be mistress of her own life. For Plath, certainly as she matured, the issue of male dominance became specific to her marriage. Not only was she submissive in that she accepted the greater part of the household duties, but she placed, or appeared to place, a greater value on Hughes' success than on her own.

The Jungian Framework

Of Plath's search for herself, Hughes has noted in his essay 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', originally written as the prologue to *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, and referring to the process of rebirth which he saw as culminating in 'Poem for a Birthday':

> A Jungian might call the whole phase a classic case of the alchemical individuation of the self. This interpretation would not tie up every loose end, but it would make positive meaning of the details of the poetic imagery--those silent horrors going on inside a glass crucible, a crucible that reappears in many forms, but always glassy and always closed. Above all, perhaps, it would help to confirm a truth--that the process was, in fact, a natural and positive process, if not the most positive and healing of all

> involuntary responses to the damage of life: a process of self-salvation--a resurrection of her deepest spiritual vitality against the odds of her fate. And the Jungian interpretation would fit the extraordinary outcome too: the birth of her new creative self.[5]

The above paragraph forms part of an essay, written with hindsight, which 'proved to be a seminal influence' (Alexander 1985, note to p. 152); it is not indicated on whom or what the influence operated. As I have already noted, Hughes destroyed the journals subsequent to 1959, the pieces included in the *Journals* subsequent to that date concern Plath's stay in hospital in 1961 (*Journals*, p. 331) and various character sketches of Devon neighbours completed in 1962 which 'were separate from her regular journals' (*Journals*, p. 341). Hughes appears to be assuming that the process of individuation was complete at the point at which the *Journals* conclude, 1959; I shall demonstrate that for Plath, this process was on-going, and that far from being complete in 1959, this date marked the commencement of the process. A Jungian interpretation based on the process of individuation offers a different framework from that suggested by Judith Kroll in *Chapters in a Mythology* which was supported by the editor of the *Journals*, Frances McCullough;[6] much of Kroll's theoretical work was based on Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Kroll 1978, p. ix), texts which we know Plath read from references in the *Journals* (p. 221) and *Letters* (p. 145); we know that she read Jung (*Letters*, p. 146) and her extracts from his work contain, amongst others, the following:

> . . . the birth of personality in oneself has a therapeutic effect. It is as if a river that had run to waste in

> sluggish side-streams and marshes suddenly found its way back to its proper bed, or as if a stone lying on a germinating seed were lifted away so that the shoot could begin its natural growth.[7]

Hughes has dated these notes 1962,[8] which surely points towards a continuing process rather than one completed some three years earlier. They do lend support to his suggestion that Plath believed she had experienced some form of rebirth of the personality.

By using the model of individuation and other aspects of Jungian psychology, I am accepting certain of the assumptions contained within that model, for example, that there is a collective and personal unconscious which can be accessed through dreams; that there is a unified or transcendent 'self' to be discerned; that the process of maturing, Jung's 'individuation', can be traced through symbols, indeed that such images do relate to the process. I believe that the images which Plath used throughout her work fit within a Jungian framework, but there are undoubted limitations to this framework: feminist scholars argue that 'the sexism of Jung's theories' must be confronted:[9]

> It is true that Jung genuinely values woman for her remarkable and all too often overlooked Eros, but it is equally true that he confines her to this sphere. Once she moves into a Logos arena, she is not only at a great disadvantage but is behaving unnaturally as well. (See note [9] above, p. 445)

Jung himself admitted that if description of the *anima* was difficult, the task becomes 'almost insuperable' in relation to the *animus* (Jung Z, p. 204); he does not extend the work on the *animus* to the same degree as that on the *anima*, and a 'feminist

critique must examine the inequity of the anima-animus model'

(see note [9] above, p. 445).

> For women, Jung's particular model militates against change in the social sphere. While men can keep control of all Logos activities and appropriate just whatever Eros they need as a kind of psychological hobby, women are by no means encouraged to develop Logos, since they are thought of as handicapped by nature in all Logos arenas. Thus the anima-animus theory does not lead to the integration of the sexes but, rather, to more separatism. (See note [9] above, p. 447)

The Jungian model operates with stereotypic masculine and

feminine forms. He notes:

> In intellectual women the animus encourages a critical disputatiousness and would-be highbrowism, which, however, consists essentially in harping on some irrelevant weak point and nonsensically making it the main one. Or a perfectly lucid discussion gets tangled up in the most maddening way through the introduction of a quite different and if possible perverse point of view. (Jung Z, p. 207)

> A man counts it a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible, just as a woman, at least until recently, considered it unbecoming to be "mannish." (Jung Z, p. 187)

The implication in this second quotation is that a man still

considers his feminine traits should not be allowed expression in

contrast with the woman's masculine traits. Jung was operating

within the terms of a patriarchal society. Frieda Fordham, an

interpreter of Jung, notes:

> Each needs to concentrate on one aspect of his or her personality: in the man's case the development of his intellect or his special skill, and in the woman's case the sacrifice of those gifts and qualities which would enable her to make her mark in the world are required. (Fordham 1953, p. 78)

We should note that the man is to *develop* his talents, the woman

to *sacrifice* hers. Goldenberg comments on the acceptance by Dr

Jolande Jacobi, another Jungian explicator, of Jung's statement

confining woman to the Eros area:

> The fact that her very successful career as author and lecturer in the realm of "Logos" seemed to contradict this statement never bothered her at all. (Goldenberg 1976, p. 446, note 11)

The same comment could be made of Fordham.

To summarise this section: we gain only a partial portrait of the artist--we may never, of course, gain a full portrait--by the editing techniques used on her work. As a woman, Plath perceived herself in terms of patriarchal society's definition of the woman, a perception which she recognised as inadequate. As I noted earlier, Hughes suggests that the process of rebirth through which she achieved her 'self', the birth of her personality, can be identified as the Jungian process of individuation. While, as I shall demonstrate, much of Plath's work can be fitted into a Jungian framework, such a framework presents problems. It is, obviously, devised by a man, and is filtered through his perception of the world at a particular historical point in time. This does not diminish its relevance, but it is a constraint of which we need to be aware when viewing a woman's progress through individuation. It is because Plath perceived herself from a patriarchal viewpoint that the Jungian framework is particularly apposite in relation to this writer: her work is an exploration and record of her own maturation process, culminating in the birth of her self, not in 1959 as Hughes has suggested, but, as I demonstrate, in 1963.

The Search for Identity

At the end of the previous section I suggested that Plath's writings are, in part at least, a record of her inner exploration, the search for her 'self'. One aspect of the aim of individuation is self-awareness and 'consists in coming to know the multiple personalities' (Wehr 1988, p. 54). Individuation is thus both process and goal, and the birth of the self was an experience of which Plath was aware from early adulthood, as comments in the *Journals* indicate. In 1952 she wrote of the 'girl who died. And was resurrected' (*Journals*, p. 65); in 1956 she wrote of 'being born again' (*Journals*, p. 113); in 1958 that 'my resurrection came about with that green and incredible Cambridge spring.' (*Journals*, p. 214) In 1957 she wrote to her mother 'I am just beginning to feel reborn' (*Letters*, p. 316), and in 1962 she noted 'I have the queerest feeling of having been reborn with Frieda . . .' (*Letters*, p. 450) This awareness of the possibility of rebirth from such an early age denies the 'the over-simplified and rather sentimental theory of childbirth as *the* stimulus' (Aird 1979, p. 63): the theory to which she refers is that advanced by Hughes:

> But the truly miraculous thing about her will remain the fact that in two years, while she was almost fully occupied with children and house-keeping, she underwent a poetic development that has hardly any equal on record, for suddeness (*sic*) and completeness. The birth of her first child seemed to start the process. All at once she could compose at top speed, and with her full weight. Her second child brought things a giant step forward. (Hughes 1965, second page)

Hughes appears to be suggesting that, as the father of her

children, in some measure he initiates Plath's poetic development, whereas she sees the establishment of her poetic identity as preceding childbirth: 'I will write until I begin to speak my deep self, and then have children, and speak still deeper.' (*Journals*, p. 166, written in 1957) She perceives childbearing as a part, but only a part, of the process of learning to speak 'from my own true deep voice in writing.' (*Journals*, p. 295) She is using her writing as a method of exploring her inner self.

Through her poems, Plath was seeking herself, seeking to give birth to that which she understood to be herself:

> Mother to myself, I wake swaddled in gauze,
> Pink and smooth as a baby. 'Face Lift' (*Poems*, p. 156)

Alicia Ostriker has noted: 'women who seek themselves will include the material of their daily lives and feelings in their poems' (Ostriker 1987, p. 89): this is an appropriate description of much of Plath's poetry. Hughes wrote: 'a poetic talent was forced into full expressive being, by internal need, for a purpose vital to the whole organism.'[10] That purpose, I suggest, is the birth of the personality, the self, in Jungian terms; it is a reconciliation and acceptance of 'the multiple personalities' (see Wehr above), an awareness of self-identity, in order that there is no necessity for Plath's question, 'Who am I?' (*Journals*, p. 192)

Hughes has proposed that Plath's 'separate poems build up into one long poem' (Hughes 1966, p. 81); I would argue that her

total output is expressive of the inward search for self-realization, and that different *genres* of writing represent different aspects of her personality. For example, the *Letters* suggest an outgoing individual, largely conforming to the norms of 1950's Western patriarchal society; in contrast, the *Journals* suggest a young woman often in conflict between the expectations generated by those norms, and her own needs. It is interesting that, like Virginia Woolf who noted, it 'is unfortunate for truth's sake that I never write here except when jangled with talk. I only record the dumps and the dismals and them very barely' (Woolf 1954, p. 300), Plath recorded, 'I only write here when I am at wits' end, in a cul-de-sac. Never when I am happy.' (*Journals*, p. 327) We could view this almost as a personal editing process: just as the *Letters* expressed that which, on the whole, Plath believed her mother wished to hear, so the *Journals* express all that she felt unable to write to her mother. The conflict evident in the *Journals* caused her pain but 'we all grow through conflict.' (Miller 1976, p. 13). Plath's *oeuvre* is a record of that growth.

A search for identity contains assumptions: that such an identity can be discovered through various means, and that the present state is, in the perception of the individual, somehow flawed. It is vital that we recognise the importance of perception: identity, as Plath discovered, comes from within. We need to be aware of the danger of reification: identity is an inner reality rather than an observable reality. Plath was aware from early adulthood of the problematic nature of identity:

> God, who am I? I sit in the library tonight, the lights glaring overhead, the fan whirring loudly. Girls, girls everywhere, reading books. Intent faces, flesh pink, white, yellow. And I sit here without identity: faceless. . . . Yet I know that back at the house there is my room, full of my presence. There is my date this weekend: someone believes I am a human being, not a name merely. And these are the only indications that I am a whole person, not merely a knot of nerves, without identity. (*Journals*, p. 17, written in 1950)

Plath perceives her identity in relation to an 'other'; inevitably, given her background, this 'other' is male, her weekend date; yet it seems her writing self exists in her room, independent of the 'other'. It is noticeable that the 'girls' are described in terms of their actions, expressions and facial colours: they are featureless. At this point in her life, identity is interwoven with physical appearance, her face, and that of her room on which she has imprinted her personality through her 'presence'. Her comment that in relation to this 'other' she becomes a 'whole person' suggests her perception, at the time of writing, of the self as *fragmented, convoluted, 'a* knot of nerves'. Rich makes a similar comment on the split within her:

> Looking back at the poems I wrote before I was twenty-one, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men. (Rich 1979, p. 40)

We should note that Rich made her comment with hindsight--the original essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', was written in 1971--whereas Plath's comment was made when she was considerably younger, indicating the degree of her self-awareness. Later in the same passage quoted above, Plath writes:

> Frustrated? Yes. Why? Because it is impossible for me to be God--or the universal woman-and-man--or anything much. I am what I feel and think and do. (*Journals*, p. 23)

In this passage, Plath perceives her identity as relating to feelings, thoughts and actions; at this point she realises that identity comes not from externally imposed roles, but from internal responses. A sense of personal failure is suggested in the phrase 'or anything much', an extension, perhaps, of her perception of herself as passive, whereas she believes she should be active in generating her own criteria, her own set of values.

While still at Smith College, she wrote:

> I am still so naive; I know pretty much what I like and dislike; but please, don't ask me who I am. "A passionate, fragmentary girl," maybe? (*Journals*, p. 69)

It is interesting that she should question her identity after stating her awareness of her own likes and dislikes, which suggests a recognition that these do not form the basis of the self. It was, of course, during her moods of depression when her identity seemed most fragile:''

> The image of identity we must daily fight to impress on the neutral, or hostile, world, collapses inward; we feel crushed. (*Journals*, p. 104)

This passage illustrates Wehr's 'multiple personalities': 'we', the different aspects of the personality, must seek to present a single identity: this itself is a reflection of something contained within the individual. It would seem that Plath perceives her identity as being the inner core, the 'stone' of which she writes in her poetry, such an identity being filtered through the many facets which can be offered to the observing

world. Her use of a battle metaphor emphasises the antagonistic nature of her relationship with the external world at this time.

For Plath, there is a further and highly significant aspect to the issue of identity:

> Winning or losing an argument, receiving an acceptance or rejection, is no proof of the validity or value of personal identity. One may be wrong, mistaken, a poor craftsman, or just ignorant--but this is no indication of the true worth of one's total human identity: past, present and future! (*Journals*, p. 107)

Her writing was intricately bound up with her perception of herself; rejection of her work implied rejection of her as an individual, an implication of which she was well aware:

> What to do with fear of writing: why fear? Fear of not being a success? Fear of world casually saying we're wrong in rejections? . . . Why do I feel that I should have a Ph.D., that I am aimless, brainless without one, when I know what is inside is the only credential necessary for my identity? (*Journals*, p. 272)

As in the earlier quotation, there is the use of 'we', again suggesting an awareness of that which Wehr has termed 'multiple personalities'. It is worth noting that this 'we' is associated with fear, specifically fear of rejection through her work: Plath appears to be implying that her writing represents the many facets of her personality and that rejection of such work implies rejection of the total person. This is followed immediately by the use of 'I', suggesting that when writing of what she knows, in this instance that that which is inside 'is the only credential necessary' for a sense of identity, the 'I' of that identity is more firmly rooted. It is noticeable that her past history of academic achievement counts for nothing with her in

the face of the one academic recognition she has not gained, but which she feels she should. As with all matters related to identity, the vital aspect is that of *self-perception*. It would appear that, while intellectually she accepts her identity as emanating from 'inside', emotionally she cannot, a problem which continued: 'writing is still used as a proof of my identity.' (*Journals*, p. 289, written in 1959) As such, publication of her work was vital in order to reaffirm this selfhood, but such proof, by its nature, creates a problem, the conflict between poet and woman.[12] 'For the words "woman" and "poet" denote opposite and contradictory qualities and roles.' (Juhasz 1976, p. 1)

To summarise, in early adulthood Plath perceived her identity as in part the writing 'I' and in part in relation to the 'other', the male; later she came to recognise that her sense of identity was within her, and part of the conflict she experienced was acceptance of that recognition. She recognised this identity had to be formed by her own labours; for example, she notes that the only cure for jealousy 'is the continual, firm positive forging of an identity and set of personal values which I believe in . . . (*Journals*, p. 109). Her difficulties were compounded by the investment of herself in her writing: rejection of this she perceived as rejection of herself. It was not until the last few months of her life that she succeeded in resolving this conflict, and came to accept her own internally generated criteria as the most appropriate for her own work;[13] in generating such

standards, her 'fear of the world' would dissipate, and she would no longer be dependent upon external approval for constant reaffirmation of her identity. For Plath, the most significant aspect of her search was for a unified self: 'to be one person, one woman' (*Journals*, p. 182), in order that the despair evident in the lines: 'So little myself all other identities threaten me' (*Journals*, p. 292), should be lightened.

The 'I' Speaker

At the end of the previous discussion, I commented on Plath's investment of herself in her writing. Because of this, it is relevant to examine the position of the subjective speaker, the I-speaker, in her work. In discussing Lacan's reading of Freud, Catherine Belsey notes:[14]

> The subject speaks, but only in so far as language permits the production of meaning, including the meaning of the subject's own identity, subjectivity itself. (Belsey 1980, p. 131)

Meaning and identity are constrained by language, and we should be aware that for Lacan, as for Jung, 'I' is necessarily male; female is therefore 'not-I'. Belsey further notes in examining the work of Benveniste:

> . . . it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I', as the subject of a sentence. (*ibid.* p. 59)

'I' can only be a concept in contrast to 'not-I', to 'you'; 'I' and 'you' are interchangeable in dialogue, 'the fundamental

condition of language.' (*ibid.* p. 59) Plath writes of herself: 'this particular individual which is spelled "I" and "you" and "Sylvia"' (*Journals*, p. 24); this suggests an awareness of the subjective nature of 'I': she perceives herself as 'I', but is perceived by others as 'you' or 'Sylvia'. All of these relate to the same physical person. A child learns that s/he is 'I' and learns to recognise a series of subject-positions which are applicable to her/himself: subjectivity 'is thus a matrix of subject-positions, which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with one another.' (Belsey, *op. cit.* p. 61)

As an example of the contradictions and incompatibilities, Belsey cites women as a group:

> Very broadly, they participate both in the liberal humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition. The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject-position within these contradictory discourses, and in consequence to find a non-contradictory pattern of behaviour, can creater (*sic*) intolerable pressures. (*ibid.* pp. 65-66)

Subjectivity is constructed in and constrained by language, discourse and, by extension, ideology (*ibid.* p. 61). Plath's I-speaker operates within the confines of Western patriarchal society and is defined by the language in use within that society.

To fit all Plath's poems into a single framework is to diminish a part of her talent, namely the ability to speak with a number of different voices. In 1957, Plath noted:

> I could write a terrific novel. The tone is the problem. . . . Joyce Cary I like. I have that fresh, brazen,

> colloquial voice. Or J. D. Salinger. But that needs an "I" speaker, which is so limiting. (*Journals*, p. 156)

At this point in her writing career, she can perceive only a single writing 'I'. In 1960, she commented:

> . . . the only three stories I am prepared to see published are all told in first person. The thing is, to develop other first persons. (*Journals*, p. 330)

From this later quotation, it is obvious that she has come to recognise the multi-faceted nature of the writing 'I'. Both these comments refer to Plath's prose writing. Can we extend these comments to her poetry, indeed, to the entire *oeuvre*? Plath often used the same autobiographical incidents in both prose and poetry: for example, 'Charlie Pollard and the Beekeepers' is the prose draft of 'The Bee Meeting', both dated 1962, and both having an I-speaker; 'The Green Rock' is a prose piece which has connections with both 'Green Rock, Winthrop Bay' and 'Suicide Off Egg Rock'; it is dated 1949, the poems respectively 1958 and 1959. The prose piece is written in the third person, while 'Green Rock, Winthrop Bay' has an I-speaker. It is of considerable relevance that, given Plath's suggestion above on the need 'to develop other first persons', 'Suicide Off Egg Rock', while largely written in the third person has the significant line, 'I am, I am, I am', where an I-speaker is introduced. This positive statement, carrying the essence of the heart-beat, can only be made subjectively, and for the 'he' of the poem, only at the point of taking his own life. Perhaps Plath is implying that an awareness of this self-identity frees the individual from external constraints.

Woolf made an interesting comment in relation to the subjective speaker, the I-speaker: 'one curious feeling is, that the writing "I" has vanished. No audience. No echo.' (Woolf 1954, p. 323) We know that Plath read this: 'I get courage by reading Virginia Woolf's *Writer's Diary*' (*Letters*, p. 305)[15]; Woolf is implying that the writing 'I' only exists for an audience, exists as a reflection back from that audience. Did Plath feel the same? She noted: 'there is no i because i am what other people interpret me as being and am nothing if there were no people.' (*Journals*, p. 72) It is significant that Plath should use the lower case here: her 'I' becomes less in relation to the 'other'. Her 'I' or 'i' is reflected back to her from those around her; without such reflection, there is, at this point, no sense of identity. From the comments in the journals, Plath recognised the significance of the I-speaker: she may have considered it constraining early in her career, but such constraint disappeared as her work matured. In her early poems the I-speaker is less prominent; however, she is present in significant poems such as 'Winter Landscape with Rooks', 'a psychic landscape' (*Poems*, p. 275) and in 'Soliloquy of the Solipsist' which concerns the all-powerful nature of an 'I'.

Plath's comment on her writing need for other I-speakers was made in November 1960 and is part of the last published journal entry, with the exceptions previously noted.'[16] Is there evidence to suggest that she achieved this goal? Her only published novel, *The Bell Jar*, was written in the summer of 1961 (*Journals*, p.

272), and has an I-speaker, Esther Greenwood. In this instance, the issue of significance in relation to the novel is perhaps less the use and expansion of events which were Plath's own personal and traumatic life-experiences, and more that, in publishing under a pseudonym, Victoria Lucas, Plath can be perceived as denying authorship. Given her need to publish as validation of her self-identity, she is demonstrating fear of rejection in an extreme form. It was, of course, her first novel, a new *genre* for her; *The Colossus* had already established her as a new young poet and she may have perceived her reputation to be endangered by her move into this different *genre*.'[7] Yet she clearly felt the novel had merit since she chose to publish it, and this can be viewed as progress in the development of her own personal criteria in relation to her work. The use of the pseudonym demonstrates a degree of ambivalence towards such criteria: in choosing to publish, she believed in the value of the work; in supplying a double filter through which she explored the issue of mental breakdown--Sylvia Plath as Victoria Lucas as Esther Greenwood--she is distancing herself from the work, and from the possibility that it be read as autobiography rather than fiction.

We should also remember the possibility of writing as therapy, an aspect of which Plath was aware:

> Fury jams the gullet and spreads poison, but, as soon as I start to write, dissipates, flows out into the figure of the letters: writing as therapy? (*Journals*, p. 255)

It is possible that if she perceived the writing of *The Bell Jar*

as catharsis, then her wish was to distance herself from such experiences. However, since there are a number of instances in which the biography and the novel do not coincide, this seems only a partial explanation, and supports the notion of another writing 'I'.

Of the stories published after 1960, only 'Mothers' (1962) can be regarded as a short story, since the other prose pieces are more factually based. This story is written in the third person and therefore does not contribute to the present discussion. The development of other first persons which Plath was prepared to acknowledge clearly lies within the poetry, and even the briefest of surveys provides evidence of this.

Throughout the poems written during 1961 and 1962 there are indications that Plath was enlarging her range of I-speakers. In 'Morning Song' (*Poems*, p. 156) the I-speaker is a woman who listens for the 'moth breath' of her child and who is 'cow-heavy and floral/In my Victorian nightgown.' She perceives the child's attempts at sounds in terms of a celebration:

> And now you try
> Your handful of notes;
> The clear vowels rise like balloons.

The I-speaker in this poem is exploring the role of mother. In contrast, the I-speaker in 'Tulips' (*Poems*, p. 160) perceives herself as without identity, 'I am nobody':

> And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow
> Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,
> And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.

Here Plath employs wordplay on 'I' and 'eye': the I-speaker perceives herself as featureless in contrast with the 'eyes' of the sun and the tulips, who have 'i'-dentity. Plath is conflating the ability to see with identity, implying that in order to find one's identity, the individual must possess the capacity to introspect. In 'Mirror' (*Poems*, p. 173) the I-speaker is the reflecting surface, a surface which offers nothing other than the image received:

> I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
> Whatever I see I swallow immediately
> Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

Yet there is a sense of movement: the mirror 'swallows' the image before giving back a 'true' reflection: 'I am not cruel, only truthful'. This flat surface becomes a lake, and thus the I-speaker achieves depths which are to be searched by a woman 'for what she really is.' Plath is using first the mirror, a reflecting surface, and then water, also a reflecting surface, but one which can be penetrated to find hidden depths, as an analogy for the development of personal insight. In 'Three Women' (*Poems*, p. 176) she examines the theme of birth through three different I-speakers, identified only in her text as First, Second and Third Voice, which suggests that rather than three different women, Plath may have perceived them as a single individual's reaction to three different possibilities contained within that theme. These varied I-speakers are all explorations of Plath's perceptions of her life experiences; they permit her to examine themes and events from different perspectives.

Of the 1963 poems, there are two which are outstanding as illustrations of Plath's I-speakers. The first is 'Child' (*Poems*, p. 265) in which the 'I' is a mother who contrasts what she wants for her child with her own conflict:

> Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
> I want to fill it with color and ducks,
> The zoo of the new

She addresses her child as:

> Pool in which images
> Should be grand and classical
>
> Not this troublous
> Wringing of hands, this dark
> Ceiling without a star.

The I-speaker moves from the contemplation of the childhood world, the 'zoo of the new' to that of the adult world, 'this dark/Ceiling *without a star.*' *The child's world is outside, the* zoo, by implication, caged, but cared for, whereas the adult's world is indoors, a lightless, and hence hopeless, room. The second of the two poems is 'Gigolo' (Poems, p. 267) in which we assume that the I-speaker is male, a young man aware of the importance of youth: 'Pocket watch, I tick well.' Like the watch, he sits in someone's pocket, and in order to remain in his profession, he must remain young: 'I shall never grow old.' It is a narcissistic profession:

> All the fall of water an eye
> Over whose pool I tenderly
> Lean and see me.

Again, there is wordplay on 'I' and 'eye'; again the implication is that identity comes from within, that the individual has to gaze inside to find her/himself. There are close links with the

Narcissus myth, he who would not grow old so long as he never knew himself; for the purposes of this discussion, the significance of the poem lies in Plath's willingness to explore another dimension of the I-speaker.

From the above, we cannot doubt that she achieved the task she set herself in November 1960, 'to develop other first persons.' (*Journals*, p. 330). The pity of her death is we shall never know the extent to which she would have enlarged her range of the writing 'I'.

In the early part of this section I noted Belsey's discussion of 'I' as valid in relation to 'not I'. For Plath, living under a patriarchal system where 'I' equates to male, it is hardly surprising that her sense of identity was fragile, that in her writings, she questioned: 'Who am I' (*Journals*, p. 192), and that her I-speaker perceived herself as 'nobody'. ('Tulips', *Poems*, p. 160) She recognised the constraints imposed by the ideology of Western patriarchal society:

> I dislike being a girl, because as such I must come to realize that I cannot be a man. (*Journals*, p. 23)

This raises the question of why she should perceive being male as an advantage. If we remember her socialisation, then the answer is not difficult to discover:

> I am jealous of men . . . It is an envy born of the desire to be active and doing, not passive and listening. I envy the man his physical freedom to lead a double life--his career, and his sexual and family life. (*Journals*, p. 35)

For Plath, to be male meant to be dominant, to be free.

Plath commented on the I-speaker in certain of her poems. Of 'The Applicant' (*Poems*, p. 221) she noted that 'the speaker is an executive, a sort of exacting supersalesman' (*Poems*, p. 293): she is extending her range of the I-speaker. Of 'Daddy' (*Poems*, p. 222) she said the poem is 'spoken by a girl with an Electra complex' (*Poems*, p. 293), but her most significant comments are in relation to 'Lady Lazarus' (*Poems*, p. 244). In contrast to the 'girl' I-speaker in 'Daddy', the I-speaker in 'Lady Lazarus is a woman::

> The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the Phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman. (*Poems*, p. 294)

We should note that Plath perceives rebirth as being both a wonderful, yet at the same time, fearful, experience. She also perceives it as a 'gift', that is, a talent which is innate, rather than an ability which can be learned. Her emphasis on the ordinary qualities of the woman suggest that this 'gift' is not confined to an elite group. In this passage, the I-speaker is complex: there is the contradiction of 'Lady' and 'Lazarus', and there is the mythical element of the phoenix. Both of these images are associated with the theme of rebirth. The woman is an advocate of free will, and she is also the embodiment of 'what you will': it is for the reader to impose her/his own interpretation on this possibly mythical female. Yet she is, at the same time, not mythical, but a woman of the everyday world. Plath's I-speaker in this poem is an admixture of contradictions.

In exploring the different aspects of the writing 'I', Plath was exploring her inner responses to her life experiences in order to achieve an ambition she noted in 1959: 'Never to step outside my own voice, such as I know it.' (*Journals*, p. 300) The depth of her knowledge of that voice increased with each successive examination of her perceptions. Virginia Woolf noted in her diary: '. . . I am I: and must follow that furrow, not copy another' (Woolf 1954, p. 346): she sought her individual self; Sylvia Plath wrote: '. . . I am I, which spells invulnerable' (*Journals*, p. 80). Her exploration of the writing 'I' was a search for an individual sense of identity which was unassailable by external forces.

TWO

INFLUENTIAL TEXTS

Introduction

In the discussion on Plath and Patriarchy in my introductory chapter, I noted the influence of Western, male-oriented society on the work and thinking of Sylvia Plath. In this chapter, I propose to examine certain texts which I consider to be influential on Plath's writing, all of which are written by men; I shall then examine in some detail one poem in which resemblances to the influential text can be traced. It is interesting to note that Plath's studies of literature were involved with predominantly male authors, while her own reading concerned predominantly female authors, perhaps indicative of her era. She studied and read widely during the whole of her life, as is shown by references to authors in both the *Letters* and *Journals*. For example, she and her mother read Auden, Yeats and Spender (*Letters*, p. 85); at Smith she studied Chaucer (*Letters*, p. 97) and Joyce (*Letters*, p. 107); at Cambridge she studied Lawrence (*Journals*, p. 128) and modern French playwrights (*Letters*, p. 186). Her own reading involving women writers included, for example, Amy Lowell (*Journals*, p. 32), Jean Stafford (*Journals*, p. 308), Elizabeth Hardwick (*ibid.*), Eudora Welty (*Journals*, p. 313) and Katherine Anne Porter (*Journals*, p. 314); this is only a small selection of the many authors mentioned in these texts. We can perhaps consider her

studies as male oriented, the public aspect of her reading, while the private aspect of her reading is female oriented. This would highlight a part of the conflict she experienced, conflict 'as woman and poet, as body and mind' (Juhasz 1976, p. 88), a conflict which was reinforced by her education.

In this chapter, I consider the nature of the influence that the texts under examination exerted with reference to themes and imagery; the three writers concerned are Arnold, Shakespeare and Plato. Those Plath readers who are familiar with other studies of her themes will note that I have not included either Graves or Frazer;' both of these influences will be referred to as appropriate in the chapters on rebirth, water imagery, and stone imagery.

The Forsaken Merman

Aurelia Plath read 'The Forsaken Merman' to her children during the time they lived in Winthrop, that is, before the death of Otto Plath, and before Plath's tenth birthday; as her first published poem appeared when she was only eight and a half (Aird 1973, p 5), it would seem safe to assume that she heard Arnold's poem in advance of that age. The following is Plath's own comment on the poem:

> I saw the gooseflesh on my skin. I did not know what made it. I was not cold. Had a ghost passed over? No, it was the poetry. A spark flew off Arnold and shook me, like a

> chill. I wanted to cry; I felt very odd. I had fallen into a new way of being happy. (*Dreams*, p. 118).

The final 'I had fallen into a new way of being happy' appears to be in complete opposition to the preceding comments, all of which are concerned with feelings of strangeness, almost of fear, the 'gooseflesh', the 'chill', the feeling 'odd'. When reading her poetry, we should bear in mind the unexpected nature of her own interpretation of emotion. This interpretation implies that for her, poetry has a dual function, that of creating a feeling of happiness whilst at the same time arousing feelings of strangeness, such emotions being aroused simultaneously. Strange, too, the past participle 'fallen': in a number of Plath poems the I-speaker is falling and in this particular instance there is a sense of inevitability, of lack of control on the part of Plath: control lies with the poetry.

On her own admission, then, 'The Forsaken Merman' was a significant poem, heard at a significant age, creating a deep and lasting impression. We know that Plath's comment was made with the benefit of hindsight, but Stephen Spender has noted that poets 'are usually aware of experiences which happened to them at the earliest age and which retain their pristine significance throughout life.'[7] Spender also notes a similar experience in relation to hearing poetry at an early age: 'My sense of the sacredness of the task of poetry began then', a reference to a journey he made with his

parents to the Lake District at the age of nine where they read Wordsworth to him.[3]

The interpretation of Arnold's poem has, of course, varied over the years: Alan Roper, from an interpretation of the poem by W Stacy Johnson, suggests that Margaret's recall to land can be seen 'as a symbolic resurrection from natural to moral life' (Roper 1969, p. 124); alternatively, from an interpretation by Howard W Fulweiler, he suggests land life can be seen as 'monotonous, repressive, and death regarding', while sea life can be seen as 'the abode of love and imagination' (*ibid.* p. 124). Roper's own view is that the poem 'records neither spiritual death nor moral resurrection, but only the sad inevitability of things.' (*ibid.* p. 127) A feminist reading of the poem suggests that it 'tells a tale of the way a poetically pathetic merman is seduced and abandoned by a "cruel" earth-woman who, claiming her own place in the sun, leaves "lonely forever/The kings of the sea."'[4] It is to be expected that most interpretations would show sympathy for the position of the Merman: 'More and more as he tells his tale, the Merman gains one's sympathy for his rich pagan values. *His* golden thrones are better than Margaret's spinning wheel' (Honan 1981, p. 90). As would be expected, interpretations vary depending upon whether the critic is female or male.

If we turn now to a consideration of 'The Forsaken Merman' in greater detail, it is a poem based on a folk tale and, as

Roper noted, may also be an allegory. Plath was only a child when she first heard the poem and from a child's point of view the element of fantasy can be likened to a child's dream world, '"The Forsaken Merman" reads like a dream she might have had.' (Simpson 1978, p. 88) By using 'Merman' in the title, and by associating it with the adjective 'forsaken', the reader's sympathies are directed towards him and therefore away from Margaret, a position maintained largely throughout the poem--and noted by Gilbert in the adjective 'cruel' quoted above--yet the strong identity in the poem belongs to Margaret who is called specifically by name, rather than the more general 'children' or 'Merman'.

In the second verse paragraph Margaret is shown as a deserter of her children: there is reproach in : 'Children's voices should be dear/(Call once more) to a mother's ear': Margaret is apparently not taking heed of her children's calls even though they are 'wild with pain'. The repetition of the line: 'This way, this way' in the first and second verse paragraphs seems to indicate a fear on the part of the Merman that the children may follow Margaret's way, and at this point in the poem there is no indication why the children 'cannot stay' when Margaret apparently can. While there is continual emphasis on the Merman's loss, 'we are long alone' and 'alone dwell for ever/The kings of the sea', only once is Margaret allowed to express her feelings in relation to her loss, which must be considered as great since she 'lost' husband and children:

And anon there breaks a sigh,
And anon there drops a tear,
From a sorrow-clouded eye,
And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh.

This creates the effect of distance from Margaret: it is for the 'cold strange eyes' of one particular child that Margaret will shed tears, not for all her children, and not for her husband. Margaret is shown to be aloof.

In the fourth verse paragraph Margaret is in 'the white-walled town' and specifically in 'the little grey church.' It is to these that the children must direct 'one last look': they are to 'call no more' for she will not come 'though you call all day'. Margaret is perceived as abandoning her children.

The fifth verse paragraph goes back in time: 'was it yesterday/We heard the sweet bells over the bay?' A description is offered of the 'caverns' where the Merman and children live: they are strewn with sand, and 'cool and deep', and are in contrast to the stormy scene on the surface described in the opening of the poem, for 'the winds are all asleep', 'the spent lights quiver and gleam'. Again, in contrast to the 'wild white horses' which 'foam and fret', in these undersea caves the sea-beasts feed 'in the ooze of their pasture-ground', the sea-snakes 'coil and twine' and 'bask in the brine'. The repetition of 'yesterday' in the final line and elsewhere in the poem

indicate a stress on the happiness of times past in contrast with the pain of today. This verse paragraph is reflective: a picture is built up of perfect harmony: at one time Margaret 'sate with you and me, /On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,' with her youngest child on her knee, whose hair she combed; she 'tended it well'. But 'down swung the sound of the far-off bell': the bells are church bells calling the villagers to worship. This is the reason for Margaret's abandonment of husband and children: ''Twill be Easter-time in the world' she says and by staying with the Merman, Margaret will lose her soul. This is the conflict for Margaret: to stay with husband and children will mean the loss of her soul; to leave her undersea world will mean the loss of husband and children, but loss whichever choice she makes. She chooses to return to land.

The approach of the storm indicates the approach of the crisis. As Margaret had risen up through the surf, so do the Merman and the children. This passage through the sea is one which both those who are human and those who are of the sea can make but only the human can remain on the land. The Merman and his children see the town and the church, and in contrast to the windless deep, the church sits 'on the windy hill', an indication that religion is perceived, at least by Arnold at this time, as superior to the villagers. The Merman and the children cannot enter the church, they stand 'without in the cold blowing airs'. They can see

Margaret, 'sate by the pillar' but she is drawing away from her family: 'she gave me never a look', says the Merman, because 'her eyes were seal'd to the holy book'. She is shown choosing to save her soul and thus lose her husband and children. The church door is shut, the Merman and the children, they of the sea, cannot gain admittance to the holy place and they return to that sea.

In the next verse paragraph, Margaret is presented in a positive way, she is singing 'most joyfully' because of the 'humming street, and the child with its toy'. But of greater significance are 'the priest, and the bell, and the holy well' and 'the blessed light of the sun'. The implication is that Margaret, by choosing to save her soul, has been 'reborn': perhaps we can view her passage up through the sea--'she went up through the surf in the bay'--as a ritual cleansing and baptism into a new life. This appears to represent a shift in focus away from the Merman: he and the children are unable to enter the church, and are, by implication, doomed to remain 'outside' society, whereas Margaret's soul has been saved, she is accepted into the church; but she has to lose her husband and children. As in the earlier verse paragraph, there is the contrast of the surface storms, the 'hoarse wind' whose 'gusts shake the door', perhaps a metaphor for Margaret's life-experiences, against the 'ceiling of amber' and the 'pavement of pearl' which will be the Merman's and the children's experience of

that same storm, and hence of life. It is the latter who will come ashore to search for their mother:

> When soft the winds blow,
> When clear falls the moonlight,
> When spring-tides are low;
> When sweet airs come seaward.

it is they who will sing of the 'loved one,/But cruel is she' for she has 'left lonely for ever/The kings of the sea.'

To summarise, there are two important themes in 'The Forsaken Merman', that of loss and, more significantly for this thesis, that of rebirth which is associated with that loss, together with water or sea imagery. We can only speculate on the impact such a poem would have on a young girl, and I offer the following on such a basis. Plath was aware of being brought up 'in the fairy-tale world of Mary Poppins and Winnie-the-Pooh' (*Journals*, p. 20) and recognised her own identification with a heroine, 'the beautiful dark-haired child (who was you)' (*ibid.*). She was 'conditioned as a child to the lovely never-never land of magic' (*ibid.*), it was:

> the lantern-lit world of nodding mandarins, of Delight in her flower garden with the slim-limbed flower sprites, of the Hobbit and the dwarves, gold belted with blue and purple hoods . . . all this I knew, and felt, and believed. All this was my life when I was young. (*Journals*, p. 21)

For the young Plath, fantasy and participation in that fantasy was part of her world. With whom did she identify in 'The Forsaken Merman'? Perhaps she perceived herself as deserted by her loved one as the Merman was deserted. Or was she Margaret, who had to lose her loved ones, who accepted a

destiny beyond the confines of earthly love and was saved by the love of God? The regular church attendance by the Plath children has been noted elsewhere:

> Sundays meant services at the Unitarian Church, where both children received perfect-attendance medals each year. (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 37)

Alternatively, she may have perceived herself as the 'abandoned' child who sat on her mother's knee while the latter 'comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it well', the child for whom Margaret sorrowed, for whom the mother gave:

> A long, long sigh;
> For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaiden
> And the gleam of her golden hair.

We can see where such identifications would fit with Plath's own later biography, but perhaps for the young Plath, the important aspect would be the separation of child from parent, and the contrast of the earthly world of 'the narrow paved streets' and 'the cold blowing airs', with the underwater world of 'caverns, cool and deep,/Where the winds are all asleep'. Yet it is the earthly world of the church that offers salvation, which could be translated perhaps as salvation by a force outside the individual. And there is the suffering, of Margaret, of the Merman, and the children, absorbed perhaps by the young listener as an awareness that fantasy and 'reality' can become intertwined and that in both there is sorrow and pain.

Did Plath in later years come to recognise the earthly world of the poem as that of the adult, the underwater world as

that of the child? She writes in the *Journals* of the awareness of adulthood, an awareness of school, exams, of:

> bread and butter, marriage, sex, compatibility, war, economics, death, and self. What a pathetic blighting of the beauty and reality of childhood. . . . why the hell are we conditioned into the smooth strawberry-and-cream Mother-Goose-world, Alice-in-Wonderland fable, only to be broken on the wheel as we grow older and become aware of ourselves as individuals with a dull responsibility in life? (*Journals*, p. 21)

Perhaps we can consider she perceived Margaret as the adult who was aware of herself and who had 'a dull responsibility in life', that of saving her soul, whereas the Merman and the children represent 'the beauty and reality of childhood.' For Plath, the coming to adulthood was a struggle to relinquish the dreams and, as she perceived it, the *reality* of childhood in order to find herself amongst the mundane elements of daily life, the 'bread and butter' of living. We should note that she perceives awareness of the self as part of the loss of childhood, and that she sees the individual as being fragmented, 'broken on the wheel'. Her anger seems to be directed at the process of socialisation which separated childhood from adulthood, equating the former with fantasy and 'beauty and reality', and, by implication, the latter with a mundane world of ugliness and non-reality.

'Dream with Clam-Diggers'

I propose in the following section to examine one particular poem in which some similarity to 'The Forsaken Merman' can be traced, including the contrast of childhood and adulthood: that poem is 'Dream with Clam-Diggers' (*Poems*, p. 43). Plath's prose version of the poem is:

> Dreaming of being home in Winthrop on a lovely new spring day, walking in pajamas down the streets of melting tar to the sea, the salt freshness, and squatting in the sea in a tangle of green weeds were clam-diggers with osier baskets, rising, one after the other, to look at me in my pajamas, and I hid in spring shame in trellised arbors of the Days' home. (*Journals*, p. 133)

This is a record of the dream which Plath said she experienced at the time Hughes and a friend came to find her, but searched for her in the wrong place. In the above passage, the clam-diggers are watching the dreamer, who feels shame because of her night attire: the opening sequence of the dream is pleasant, but the ending not so. Similarly, the opening line of the poem is optimistic: 'The dream budded bright with leaves around the edges'; the traveller, who is 'stained after tedious pilgrimages' is returning 'to her early sea-town home', but she experiences a shock: 'Barefoot, she stood, in shock of that returning' for there is no change in the town:

> No change met her: garden terrace, all summer
> Tanged by melting tar,
> Sloped seaward to plunge in blue; fed by white fire,
> The whole scene flared welcome to this roamer.

It seems she expected change, but found none; perhaps she had been changed by her experiences, her 'tedious pilgrimages',

since leaving home and expected her surroundings to reflect something of that change. There is a dream-like quality to the scene for the gulls do not cry, and the children play silently:

> High against heaven, gulls went wheeling soundless
> Over tidal-flats where three children played
> Silent and shining on a green rock bedded in mud,
> Their fabulous heyday endless.

This quality is further emphasised by the final line which combines an appreciation of the summer days of childhood with a fantasy element, an element so often involved in children's play. Or is the element of fantasy that, as adults, we perceive childhood as a time of 'beauty and reality'?

In the next stanza an atmosphere of threat is implied with the children's toy ship sinking, 'its crew knelled home for dinner', a suggestion of a death-bell; the sense of threat is strong in the final line of the penultimate stanza:

> Plucked back thus sudden to that far innocence,
> She, in her shabby travel garb, began
> Walking eager toward water, when there, one by one,
> Clam-diggers rose up out of dark slime at her offense.

At this point we do not know the nature of her 'offense': this is clarified in the final stanza, it is the girl's 'first move of love', when she approaches the water: can we understand this as the first move towards self-love and self-understanding? Plath has extended the poem from the external landscape to a landscape which 'is an entirely interior, mental one in which external objects have become

converted into symbols of hysterical vision'.[5] There can be little doubt that the exterior state came to represent that of the interior, but Plath's vision was controlled, and as Aird notes of 'Lady Lazarus' the 'hysteria is intentional and effective.' (Aird 1973, p. 84)

> Grim as gargoyles from years spent squatting at sea's
> border
> In wait amid snarled weed and wrack of wave
> To trap this wayward girl at her first move of love,
> Now with stake and pitchfork they advance, flint eyes fixed
> on murder.

The clam-diggers are visualised as barriers to this self-understanding. Or perhaps we should accept that 'our identity lies in an unconscious life symbolized by water' (Langbaum 1977, p. 63): the girl is searching for her identity as Margaret was searching for her soul. We should possibly consider soul and identity as synonymous. The clam-diggers represent the depths of the unconscious which prevent the girl from discovering her self; she risks her life in trying to return to the sea, in endeavouring to penetrate her unconscious. The struggle for spiritual development can result in 'the birth of a new insight or conscious awareness . . . from the depths of the unconscious (the sea)'. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 380) Hughes has commented that occasionally, Plath 'anticipated herself and produced a poem . . . which now seems to belong quite a bit later.' (*Poems*, p. 17) While 'Dream with Clam-Diggers' is not amongst those he lists, it undoubtedly indicates the direction in which Plath progressed in her poetry wherein

her physical landscapes came to represent psychical landscapes and in which she sought to find her self by exploring her perceptions of her life experiences in that poetry.

While there are clear differences between this poem and 'The Forsaken Merman', there are a number of similarities beyond the obvious one of a central female figure who returns to her sea-town home. It is possible to perceive each poem as an analogy: the children and the Merman in Arnold's poem appear to represent the pleasures of childhood, a state of innocence to which the girl sought to return in Plath's poem: 'Plucked back thus sudden to that far innocence'. Margaret passes through the sea to the church and hence saves her soul; the 'wayward girl' walks 'eager toward water', endeavouring perhaps to find her own identity.

I pointed out earlier in this discussion that it is possible to find parallels in Plath's biography for the process of identification with various of the characters in 'The Forsaken Merman', and that interpretations of the poem vary according to gender.

> This is better than a dream, it is prophecy. The merman and his children have been abandoned, and Aurelia and her children will be abandoned by Otto when he dies. But the "little Mermaiden" with golden hair has a special relationship with the absent one. It is for her that Margaret sighs--and Sylvia will have a special relationship with her dead father. (Simpson 1978, p. 89)

In this observation, Simpson is equating female parent with male parent: perhaps this was an alternative reading for Plath of this particular poem. It has been noted elsewhere that Plath uses the themes of 'estrangement and of hostility and threat' (Melander 1972, p. 111); in 'Dream with Clam-Diggers' the girl's estrangement is from her childhood, perhaps from herself; the clam-diggers are hostile to her and represent a threat. In 'The Forsaken Merman', Margaret is estranged from her husband and children, she is threatened with loss of her soul. Together with the important theme of rebirth, we can understand something of the influence that 'The Forsaken Merman' exerted on Plath and her work.

The Tempest

Sylvia Plath first heard 'The Forsaken Merman' read to her by her mother at a significantly early age; similarly, her first experience of the theatre was early: Aurelia Plath took both her children to Margaret Webster's production of *The Tempest* when her daughter was twelve:

> I told the children I would buy good tickets for us all . . if they read the play and could tell me the story of it. I gave Sylvia my copy of Shakespeare's complete works (*Letters*, p. 31).

Given her desire to please her mother, we can assume that Plath did read the play: in it she would have encountered some of the themes and images first heard in 'The Forsaken Merman'.

> Sylvia's fascination with Ariel, Miranda, and Caliban, then, dated from January of 1945. *The Tempest* is not a play she read in school but the father-daughter relationship, the reunion, the ocean, and the androgynous powers of Ariel make the story especially germane to a young girl fashioning her adolescent self-image. (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 37)

That this particular play was of great significance to Plath is indicated by a journal entry. Writing of the book which was to become *The Colossus* and at this stage calling it *Full Fathom Five* she says that it

> has the background of *The Tempest*, the association of the sea, which is a central metaphor for my childhood, my poems and the artist's subconscious, of the father image--relating to my own father, the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted, to the sea-father Neptune--and the pearls and coral highly-wrought to art: pearls sea-changed from the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull routine. (*Journals*, p. 222)

Plath makes it clear that the sea represents her childhood which was, for her, a time of 'beauty and reality' (*Journals*, p. 21); I would argue that it represents the unconscious, a Jungian interpretation, to which I refer in a later chapter. She is also suggesting that the sea represents her poetry; perhaps she is implying that it emerges from the unconscious, indeed, is part of that unconscious. She perceives the dominant male authority figure--and we should remember the subsequent title of the volume--as part father, part male muse, and part mythical figure. She seems to be suggesting that Hughes is the embodiment of 'the buried male muse and god-creator', demonstrating either an

idealization of Hughes himself, or that her perception of the male authority figure in her life should embody these roles. It is interesting to note that Plath refers to the male muse: this is in direct contrast with the traditionally accepted idea of a female muse: 'woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing.' (Graves 1961, p. 446) Graves adds the following as a footnote:

> There are only a few recorded references in English Literature to a male Muse, and most of these occur in poems written by homosexuals and belong to morbid pathology. However, George Sandys in *A Relation of a Journey Begun* (1615) calls James 1 a 'Crowned Muse' . . . And Milton writes in *Lycidas:*
>
> > *So may some gentle Muse*
> > *With lucky words favour my destin'd urn*
> > *And, as he passes, turn.*
> > *And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.*
> > (Graves 1961, p. 446)

Plath would almost certainly have been aware of this passage from Graves--we know from the *Journals* that she read his work (*Journals*, p. 221)--how much influence it may have had is not known, although others have suggested such influence may have been considerable (Kroll 1978, p. ix), but possibly some of the conflict she experienced later may have stemmed from her perception of herself as poet and as muse for Hughes. This is the conflict of woman and poet to which I referred in my introductory chapter and to which I return in my concluding chapter.

The final lines of the passage from the *Journals* suggest the comment she made some years later:

> I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being

> tortured, this sort of experince, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and an intelligent mind. (Orr 1966, p. 169)

Experiences, 'the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull routine' (*Journals*, p. 222) are to be manipulated and controlled to create the 'pearls' of her art. In Plath's own words we have the significance to her of the 'sea-change', of the paternal relationship and of the sea, all associated with *The Tempest*. I suggested that there was some doubt as to which character Plath identified herself with in 'The Forsaken Merman': it seems feasible to assume that she identified with Miranda through this character's relationship with her father, the all-powerful male figure, and her dependence on this figure for her needs, both spiritual and emotional. We can thus view *The Tempest* as a profound influence on Plath, an influence which continued throughout her life, indeed it has been considered as the central source of many of her later poems. (Uroff 1979, p. 68)

In the following discussion it is not my intention to offer a comprehensive analysis of *The Tempest*, but only to examine those aspects which I consider to be of relevance to my thesis. It is immediately obvious that the themes from 'The Forsaken Merman' which were of significance for Plath reappear in the play; she would thus have received reinforcement of her own belief of the importance of such themes. In this play, the emphases, amongst others, are 'upon the sea, upon loss and recovery' (Introduction to *The Tempest* p. 23), all emphases evident in 'The Forsaken Merman'. 'Regeneration emerges dominant from the total tragic

pattern' (Tillyard 1938, p. 82). I have already suggested that, for Plath, rebirth is an important theme of 'The Forsaken Merman', and it occupies a similar position in *The Tempest*. Whereas in the Arnold poem, it is only Margaret who undergoes a process of regeneration--she is 'reborn' in the sense that her soul is saved by her choice of returning to the land from her sea home--in the play a number of the characters are reborn, among them Miranda, who can be viewed as the 'symbol of regeneration' (Tillyard 1938, p. 83).

The theme of loss which was evident in 'The Forsaken Merman' is apparent in *The Tempest*: the loss of status for Prospero, who says that the King of Naples

> Should presently extirpate me and mine
> Out of the dukedom, and confer fair Milan,
> With all honours on my brother. (I.2.125-127)

There is a similar loss for Caliban:

> This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me. (I.2.331-2)

Ferdinand believes he has lost his father to the sea: 'my drowned father' (I.2.406); Prospero loses his daughter 'I/Have lost my daughter' (V.1.147-8), Alonso loses his son and his daughter, the latter in marriage:

> My son is lost, and, in my rate, she too,
> Who is so far from Italy removed
> I ne'er again shall see her. (II.1.110-113)

Marriage is perceived as a form of loss. Perhaps we can consider that Miranda will lose her father through marriage; Plath would certainly have identified with the daughter's loss of the father.

Miranda, in her marriage to Ferdinand, can be perceived to be losing her self:

> I am your wife, if you will marry me.
> If not, I'll die your maid. To be your fellow
> You may deny me, but I'll be your servant
> Whether you will or no. (III. 1. 82-85)

Miranda perceives herself in the future only in terms of role, and this could be seen as a source of Plath's self-perception, not only in her own marriage, but in her life, leading to her question: 'Who am I?' (*Journals*, p. 192)

As in the Arnold poem the elements, the winds and the sea, form a framework for the action of the play and are indicators of the nature of that action:

> From the beginning to the end of Shakespeare's work all 'projects' are associated with sea adventures; adverse fortune with tempests, but happiness with calm seas and the 'gentle breath' of loving winds . . . (Knight 1932, p 266)

This is a possible source of Plath's ambiguous reaction to the sea, viewing it as both haven and threat. *The Tempest* opens with the storm which apparently drowned the entire ship's company: 'Poor souls, they perished' (I. 2. 9) and yet there is 'no harm done' (I. 2. 15); 'we see the tempest here to be, in effect, utterly harmless' (Knight 1932, p. 250). Again, this could be a source for an ambivalent attitude to the sea.

We should note a significant event for Plath, that of her brother's birth, an event which occurred before she was three years old, and which she remembers in the context of the sea:

> Then one day the textures of the beach burned themselves on the lens of my eye forever. (*Dreams*, p. 119)

Despite the fact that she is actually told of the impending birth while sitting on the stone steps of her grandmother's house (*ibid.*), it is the seascape that Plath recalls. By the sea, her childhood landscape, she learns that she is no longer the only child:

> I hated babies. I who for two and a half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth. (*Dreams*, p. 120)

This passage was written with hindsight, but there can be no doubt of the deep impression this event made on Plath. Did she consider that her mother had 'abandoned' her? It is interesting that, from the evidence of the above passage, she now considers herself as apart from life, 'a bystander', one who records events, rather than a participant, yet she is also 'a museum mammoth', an extinct creature whose only use is to serve as a spectacle at which others may stare.

Miranda also has a memory of early life: hers is of life before the island, a time when she 'wast not/Out three years old' (I.2.40-41):

> 'Tis far off,
> And rather like a dream than an assurance
> That my remembrance warrants. (I.2.44-46)

Both remembered experiences precede a separation from one known way of life and entry into a new and unknown one: perhaps perception is heightened at such significant moments. Whereas Miranda's memory is dream-like, Plath's remembrance possesses a nightmare quality. We can perhaps understand something of her preoccupation with rebirth: at this early stage in her life, she

was, in a sense, already being 'transformed' into the role of sibling, a transformation she neither sought nor wished. In her later search for rebirth, her aim was that such transformation should be within her own control.

I suggested earlier that the theme of rebirth is highly significant for Plath. An important speech in this connection is that made by Gonzalo:

> In one voyage
> Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
> And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
> Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom
> In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves
> When no man was his own. (V. 1. 208-213)

While Miranda, as I noted earlier, may be the symbol of regeneration, it is clear that all the characters in the play undergo a 'sea-change': the passage through or over the sea--the voyage--becomes the point at which 'no man was his own' and at the end of that passage, transformation in some form, rebirth, occurs, as it does for Margaret in 'The Forsaken Merman'. In *The Tempest* there is a continual emphasis on the sea from the opening storm scene with its stage direction: *'A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard'*, raising a sea in which the company will 'all sink wi'th'King' (I. 1. 59), to Prospero's final speech: 'I'll deliver all, /And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales.' (V. 1. 314-15) Before the play opens, Prospero and Miranda pass over the sea to the island where Prospero achieves strange powers; the entire company of the ship appear to have drowned, yet this is not so, they are 'reborn' into a greater knowledge of themselves. Prospero promises new understanding to all: 'My

charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore, /And they shall be themselves.' (V. 1. 31-2) Ferdinand also comments on his gain from Prospero: 'of whom I have/Received a second life' (V. 1. 194-5). It is, at this point, possible to consider a metaphoric interpretation of the play, yet another construction to be placed on *The Tempest*:

> At various times the play has been said to be about almost everything: from the nature of the poetic imagination to the three-part division of the soul, the wonders of Renaissance science to man's colonial responsibilities. (Introduction to *The Tempest* p. 21)

I would suggest that, for Plath, the play can be seen as an exploration of the theme of rebirth, a natural transformation process which follows a 'loss', and which results in greater understanding and new knowledge of the self.

'Full Fathom Five'

Ariel's song is a comment on transformation:

> Full fathom five thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange. (I. 2. 397-402)

Clearly it is this song that Plath recalled when she wrote of the 'pearls sea-changed from the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull routine' (*Journals*, p. 222), the transformation of the ordinary through art into the extraordinary. The opening of Ariel's song provides the title for Plath's poem, 'Full Fathom Five' (*Poems*,

p. 92), of which she wrote that she considered it 'one of my best and curiously moving poems about my *father-sea-god muse*' (*Journals*, p. 243, my italics). This poem had a further influence: Hughes notes that she composed it 'while reading one of Cousteau's books about the submarine world, alternating reading and writing without moving her position.' (*Poems*, p. 287) He is recognising her total absorption in the underwater world. In this poem, the influence of the father-sea-god muse, the 'old man', is immense:

> Miles long
>
> Extend the radial sheaves
> Of your spread hair . . .

The hair is imagined as reaching out from a central point like arrows to touch far distant objects and in which is caught the 'old myth of origins/Unimaginable.' This figure survives from a time so long past it cannot be understood by a mortal.

Prospero commented that not one hair of the company of the ship had been hurt: his power, too, was immense, god-like. In Plath's poem this mythical figure is not to be understood, it is 'to be steered clear/Of, not fathomed.' There appears to be some form of peril attached to an understanding of this figure: perhaps Plath is implying that, since it is a mythical sea figure, and that water (the sea) 'is the commonest symbol for the unconscious' (Jung 1940, p. 67), knowledge of the unconscious can be dangerous.

> All obscurity
> Starts with a danger:
>
> Your dangers are many.

Prospero returned his magic to the sea:

> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book. (V. 1. 55-58)

The unconscious is seen as the recipient of his magic arts.

> I
> Cannot look much but your form suffers
> Some strange injury
> And seems to die:

These lines echo Ariel's song that Antonio 'doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange'. It is interesting that the I-speaker imagines the change to be brought about by her viewing of the mythical figure, implying that, rather than an actual change, it is a change in perception by the I-speaker. The 'death' is not an actual death, but again, by implication, is caused by the I-speaker watching.

Plath incorporates a further allusion to the play:

> The muddy rumors
>
> Of your burial move me
> To half-believe: your reappearance
> Proves rumors shallow . . .

This has a link with Prospero's comment on the various members of the company:

> Their understanding
> Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
> Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
> That now lies foul and muddy. (V. 1. 79-82)

If we use a metaphoric interpretation of the play, that it is a journey to self-knowledge, then Prospero is implying that the incoming sea, perhaps the contents of the unconscious, will

clarify the self-understanding of each individual. Plath's comment in the poem is less easily analysed, the 'muddy' element emerges in her writing, no doubt deliberately: she seems to be conflating the mythical figure with a male presence--perhaps the Jungian *animus*--in the unconscious, and is thus suggesting that this figure has 'died', perhaps has been 'overcome', or, again in Jungian terms, the *animus* has been integrated. It is not clear if the reappearance is welcome or not. Plath's description of this figure is revealing:

> Waist down, you may wind
>
> One labyrinthine tangle
> To root deep among knuckles, shinbones,
> Skulls. Inscrutable,
>
> Below shoulders not once
> Seen by any man who kept his head . . .

The lower half of the body is perceived as amongst bones, in touch with aspects of death, and only above the shoulders, the head--and hence the source of mental activity--can be seen. Plath is implying that those who seek to explore their unconscious have to concentrate on their own inner life: the externals, the 'knuckles, shinbones,/Skulls' are 'dead', in that they are of no use in this search for the self. 'You defy questions': in the search for self, the individual can only question her/himself.

Like Margaret in 'The Forsaken Merman', the I-speaker is exiled:

> I walk dry on your kingdom's border
> Exiled to no good.

This could be interpreted that without this father-figure, the I-speaker serves no useful, no 'good', purpose in life, that her exile is pointless. As is Miranda on Prospero, so the I-speaker is dependent on this god-like figure.

'Your shelled bed I remember.' The I-speaker visualizes the floor of the sea, and if we link this back to the lines: 'Below shoulders not once/Seen by any man who kept his head', she seems to be implying that she has 'lost' her head. This can be interpreted that she has, at this point, 'lost' her identity; or it could be that the I-speaker as female can not only 'see'--and hence 'understand'--the nature of the mythical figure, but she can also 'keep' her head, perhaps come to a deeper understanding of herself.

> Father, this thick air is murderous.
> I would breathe water.

These final two lines stress the importance of the unconscious: the I-speaker recognises the need to plunge into the sea; to remain above the water, unaware of the contents of her own inner depths is to be 'killed' by that unknowing. Other critics have offered a different interpretation: for example, Melander suggests that it is an 'explicit expression of a wish to die.' (Melander 1972, p. 84) Plath uses this image of breathing water in other poems: in 'The Ghost's Leavetaking' (*Poems*, p. 90), she writes of 'our thick atmosphere' which the ghost will transcend, moving, not into the sea, but towards the sky,

. . . the cloud-cuckoo land of color wheels

And pristine alphabets and cows that moo
And moo as they jump over moons as new
As that crisp cusp towards which you voyage now.

The sky, the heights, are now perceived in terms of childhood fantasy; in contrast the sea, the depths, perhaps represent adult reality. 'Lyonnesse' (*Poems*, p. 233) also has a link with the 'shelled bed' and 'thick air' of 'Full Fathom Five':

The clear, green, quite breathable atmosphere,
Cold grits underfoot'

describes the place where the Lyonian people find themselves after they have been forgotten by 'the big God' who has 'let them slip//Over the English cliff and under so much history!'

The Lyonians had always thought
Heaven would be something else . . .

The implication from these lines is that this underwater world is 'heaven', and while they appear to have been forgotten, this place 'was not a shock', for in it were 'the same faces,/The same places . . .' As in 'Full Fathom Five', at this point, the unconscious is not to be feared, but to be welcomed.

The I-speaker in 'Full Fathom Five' wishes to go into the sea, into her unconscious: the 'going down and coming up are essential parts of the search for self' (Hall 1980, p. 206). This provides a link with the theme of loss; I suggested, in the discussion of *The Tempest*, that Miranda perceives herself in the future only in terms of role, in a sense, she 'loses' herself in marriage. In Plath's poem, if the I-speaker is searching for her self, she is implying either that, at some point, the self was 'lost' and is

to be re-found, or that the self is still to be discovered. We can also consider this search as the Jungian concept of individuation:

> The process of individuation is one of growing strength and integration of its individual personality, but it is at the same time a process in which the original identity with others is lost and in which the child becomes more separate from them. This growing separation may result in an isolation that has the quality of desolation and creates intense anxiety and insecurity.' (Fromm 1942, p. 25)

We know from Plath's library that she possessed a copy of *Fear of Freedom* from which this passage is taken.[6] We cannot, of course, assume that she read it, but it is interesting that she should possess a text which discusses individuation, together with its accompanying sense of loss.

'The Forsaken Merman' highlighted themes of loss, the separation of parent and child, and rebirth, the finding of oneself after a passage through water. In *The Tempest*, Plath would have recognised similar themes. She would also no doubt have been aware of the element of fantasy contained in each text. We know that she equated fantasy with the 'beauty and reality of childhood' (*Journals*, p. 21); in these two texts, she would have been able to perceive the process of change through which the individual must pass in order to find the self, to move into adulthood.

Plato's Texts

The reason for choosing Plato's works as the third aspect of this chapter on 'Influential Texts' stems largely from Sylvia Plath's own comments: 'I once knew Plato well' (*Journals*, p. 320). In thematic terms, from her comments on Plato, we can consider rebirth as being an aspect of his thinking which would have influenced her,[7] although there appears to be little evidence that she absorbed the Platonic concept of the choice of the next life on earth by the soul when it is in the next world. We can only speculate that she perceived death, symbolic or actual, as the punishment through which the soul had to go in order to be reborn.[8]

Plath was introduced to Plato by Wilbury Crockett during her time at Bradford High (1947-1950):

> Crockett, who had begun teaching at Bradford in 1944, tried to bring literature and writing into his students' lives. . . . Hemingway, Eliot, Frost, Dickinson, Faulkner, Hardy, Lawrence, Yeats, Joyce, Woolf, Dylan Thomas, much Shakespeare, Plato, Greek drama, Mann . . . (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 43).

Plato was also one of the Moralists she studied during her time at Cambridge under the tutorship of Dorothea Krook, 'the brilliant, attractive woman supervisor' (*Letters*, p. 228), although according to Mary Ellen Chase, "It's hard to know *which* she's talking about, whether it's Plato or Mrs. Krook she admires most. . . ."[9] The particular aspects of Plato studied by the group are mentioned by Dr Krook--Plath refers to her as 'Dr' rather than 'Mrs': *Letters*, p. 243--, although it must be

remembered that this article was written some time before 1977, ten years or more after Plath's death:[10]

> I have racked my memory to recall what were some of the particular things I said to Sylvia or she to me about Plato and the rest. But I can remember nothing: not a single utterance. All that comes back to me is a general vision, clear and pure like the golden light of the Platonic world we had appropriated, of an extraordinarily happy freedom of communication. Love and beauty in the *Symposium*, justice in the *Republic*, the pleasant and the good in the *Gorgias*, knowledge and opinion in the *Meno*, the contemplative intelligence, the practical intelligence, the Platonic rationalism, the Platonic mysticism: these must have been some of the great topics we entered into and lost ourselves in.[11]

There is no mention of rebirth in connection with these various texts. In her published works, Plath herself mentions only one text, *Gorgias*: she and Dr Krook 'had a fine, spirited hour, discussing Plato's Gorgias' (*Letters*, p. 242), but amongst her personal books held at the Lilly Library are the following:

> Five dialogues / Plato. -- London : J M Dent & Sons, Ltd. ; New York : E.P Dutton & Co., Inc., [1952] (Everyman's Library; 456)
>
> Plato / with an English translation ... by Harold North Fowler ; and an introduction by W.R.M. Lamb. -- London : W. Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1953 (The Loeb Classical Library; Plato. 1)
>
> Plato / with an English translation ... by W.R.M. Lamb. -- London : W. Heinemann Ltd. ; Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1953 (The Loeb Classical Library; Plato. V)
>
> Plato's The republic / translated into English by B. Jowett. -- New York : The Modern Library, [n.d.]

There are sections of these texts which are underlined and annotated.[12]

From *Gorgias*, the concept which Plath adopted is that of the separable soul:

> . . . death, as it seems to me, is actually nothing but the disconnexion of two things, the soul and the body, from each other. (Plato [ed. Lamb] 524 B, p. 519)
>
> . . . when a man's soul is stripped bare of the body, all its natural gifts, and the experiences added to that soul as the result of his various pursuits, are manifest in it. (Plato *ibid.* 524 D, p. 521)[13]

The notes to these sections by Dodds expand the above:

> Socrates asserts that after death the soul and the body stay much the same as they were in life. The major difference in the body is that it is dead. . . . But Socrates clearly does not think that it is a dead soul which survives the separation of body and soul. . . . the body is never strictly alive, but just acts differently when it is joined to the soul, the only real source of life. (Plato [commentary by Dodds] Notes to 524b, p. 244).

This concept of the separable soul has been noted elsewhere in connection with Plath's poetry:

> Sylvia Plath obviously sensed that if one were to experience imminent death, the inessential aspects of self and personal history could separate from and be regarded by the permanent true self, leaving a sense of eternity and unity with the world. This helps to explain the logic of the imagery of the separable soul . . . . (Kroll 1978, p. 169)

Plath does not appear to adopted the Platonic idea of reincarnation.[14, 15] She wrote often of death, which gave rise to descriptions of her as having 'a delight in the knowledge of disintegration and death' (Juhasz 1976, p. 91); 'an awareness of and fascination with death'; 'a desire for wholeness that she could equate only with death' (*ibid.* p. 103). She was, according to one critic, 'drawn to sickness, mutilation, attacks, and dying'[16], and another critic notes that the uniting factor in her work was death 'and the persona's ambivalent response to death' (Melander 1972, p. 96). However, I do not believe Plath viewed such a death as an actual bodily death: it was symbolic and

related to the loss which is emphasised in many of the early poems. We can, of course, speculate that this relates back to the loss of her father, but this takes us too far into biographical material. The point at issue is not whether she did or did not adopt the concept of reincarnation; what is of importance is that through her reading of Plato, she would have received further reinforcement of the significance of this theme. Reincarnation is one of the definitions of rebirth detailed by Jung in his chapter 'Forms of Rebirth' (Jung 9, Part 1, pp. 113-115) and which I discuss in the chapters on rebirth.

If we turn now to Plath's own notes, firstly those on the *Gorgias* (undated), her concluding paragraph reads:

> Socrates closes his debate with a picture of the world beyond, in which the worldly garment of the body & its adornments is stripped off after death and the soul is judged in its nakedness for the afterlife. The wicked undergo punishment (a good, we must remember, to make them healthy); the incurably wicked are tortured as examples, and among these are many powerful tyrants.[17]

It is clear from this that Plath was aware of the notion of the separable soul and that the soul continues after bodily death, an awareness emphasised by the three pages of handwritten comments at the end of the typewritten notes in which she notes the 'indestructability *(sic)* of soul - survival after death' and 'life after death (separation of soul & body)'.

> The general tone of the *Phaedo* is that life is an unhappy partnership between body and soul, in which the body causes continual trouble for its partner, distracting it from its proper business in all cases, and positively corrupting it in most; and that death is the dissolution of this partnership . . . (Crombie 1962, p. 303)

In her second set of notes on Plato and Popper (dated May 14, 1956), Plath discusses 'the myths and theories man has advanced throughout history to place the "ideal state" either behind or ahead of us, according to pessimism or optimism'.[18] She comments that 'if we accept man's rise from the apes and lower animals, we may turn optimistic and . . . in the spiritual realm, we may find comfort in the promise of a Christian Heaven or a happier transmigration of the soul, the next time round' (see note [18] above, p. 3). Her definition of death is given in these pages, it is '"the inaccessibility to experience"' in which she includes 'all the varieties of death-in-life' (see note [18] above, p. 4). In terms of her poetry, therefore, since at all times the I-speaker has access to sensory experience--others have commented on the sensual nature of Plath's work: her 'gift for evoking sound, touch, taste, as well as visual sensations, is vigorous'[19]--the view taken of death cannot be of an actual death: as already noted, it is a symbolic death.

To summarise, from the evidence of her own writings, Plath appears to have adopted the notion of the separable soul; she does not appear to have adopted other Platonic concepts and we can therefore perhaps question whether this philosopher was an influence in any significant way. Possibly his significance for Plath lies not so much in his writings but in the link he provides with Jung who was himself drawn to the thought of Plato 'despite the longwindedness of Socratic argument' (Jung 1963, p. 76). Jung did not believe in reincarnation (*ibid.* p. 222), but

he perceived the soul as a quaternity which 'often has a 3 + 1 structure, in that one of the terms composing it occupies an exceptional position or has a nature unlike that of the others. . . . This is the "Fourth", which, added to the other three, makes them "One", symbolising totality.' (*ibid.* p. 354) Plato also believed the soul had a tripartite structure; Jung's addition of the "Fourth" making the "One" can thus be seen as an extension of the Platonic definition. I return to the discussion of the soul in the conclusion to this chapter.

'Totem'

Certain of Plath's poems carry a specific mention of Plato, for example: 'the pure/Platonic table' in 'Private Ground' (*Poems*, p. 130), and 'some lamp-headed Plato' in 'Magi' (*Poems*, p. 148). A third poem, 'Totem' (*Poems*, p. 264) dated the end of January 1963 is, I believe, the most significant. Of this poem, Plath said that it was 'a pile of interconnected images, like a totem pole' (*Poems*, p. 295), and Kroll notes that it 'provides a good example of Plath's poetic process.' (Kroll 1978, p. 274) Frazer has pointed out that in certain societies the totem can be regarded 'as a receptacle in which a man keeps his soul or one of his souls' (*Fr*azer 1924, p. 690)[20], the plurality of souls also being an idea that 'has commended itself to philosophers like Plato, as well as to savages.' (*ibid.* p. 690)

In *Phaedo* three different parts are distinguished which make up the whole soul:

> The 'top part' is the reasoning part . . . and this both pursues theoretical reasoning (about forms) and has the job of controlling the desires. The 'bottom' part is called the desiring part . . . and this is responsible for the bodily desires and for such longer-term desires as spring from the bodily desires, such as the love of money. . . . Finally, the 'middle' part is called the spirited part . . . and to some extent it seems to represent emotions, such as anger or self-reproach, while to some extent it seems to be the seat of another kind of desire, the desire for honour and glory and success in public life. (Plato [ed. Bostock] 1986, p. 40)

Plath's copies of Plato's works were heavily underlined and annotated (see note [12] above); we can only assume that Plath studied in detail those texts so marked: *The Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, and *The Republic*, and that she would have read sections such as those describing the soul and reincarnation.

Can we consider that Plath's poem concerns the soul's receptacle and if so, what is the I-speaker's totem? An animal or plant is the most common form of totem; a number of animals are mentioned in the poem:

> Dawn gilds the farmers like pigs,
> Swaying slightly in their thick suits,
>
> White towers of Smithfield ahead . . .

Hughes offers comments on the animals included in the poem. Of the above quotation he says that Plath 'imagines the West country farmers in the early morning train, on their way up to London to the great meat market at Smithfield' (*Poems*, p. 295). Of the line: 'In the bowl the hare is aborted,' he notes that a pyrex bowl was used on different occasions 'both for her son's

afterbirth and the cleaned body of a hare.' (*Poems, ibid.*) There is a discrepancy between Hughes and Plath here: Plath's comment is that the midwife 'sponged her beside the bed in my big pyrex mixing bowl' referring to the birth of their daughter (*Letters*, p. 374), and is the earlier reference. Hughes refers to the birth of their son. The 'counterfeit snake' in the poem was 'an articulated toy snake of scorch-patterned bamboo joints.' (*Poems, ibid.*) The 'spider, waving its many arms' may be a reference to Radin's *African Folktales* which Plath read at the time she was writing 'Poem for a Birthday' (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 168); alternatively, the spider is, according to Jung, a theriomorphic symbol:

> Because of its unconscious component the self is so far removed from the conscious mind that it can only be partially expressed by human figures; the other part of it has to be expressed by objective, abstract symbols. . . . Theriomorphic symbols are the dragon, snake, elephant, lion, bear . . . the spider, crab, butterfly, beetle, worm, etc. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 187)

Plath might be seen to be overdemonstrating the plurality of souls.

The specific lines referring to Plato are:

> In the bowl the hare is aborted,
> Its baby head out of the way, embalmed in spice,
>
> Flayed of fur and humanity.
> Let us eat it like Plato's afterbirth,
>
> Let us eat it like Christ.
> These are people that were important--

The hare, in certain societies appears as 'the founder of human culture. . . . He became merged with the figure of Christ' (Jung 1978, pp. 104-5). In the above lines from the Plath poem, the

baby and the hare have merged, the baby has become Christ and in this, Plath is echoing the earlier image in 'Nick and the Candlestick' (*Poems*, p. 240), 'the baby in the barn.' In eating the body of Christ the speakers of the poem are asking for forgiveness of sins, for the preservation of the body and soul into everlasting life; they are also seeking to be reborn without those sins. The phrase 'Plato's afterbirth' is not easy to interpret. Kroll makes the following comments:

> When she says, "Let us eat it *like* Plato's afterbirth," "*like* Christ," she invokes the ancient sacramental act of "eating the god," a reminder of life and death with sacred meaning. . . . Redemption cannot be found through metaphorical eating of Plato and Christ--through mystically participating in the being of "important" men--because their importance is empty, dead, counterfeit, and harmless: devoid of essential power, just as they are. (Kroll 1978, p. 188)

We need to be aware of Plath's own notes on Plato: under the heading 'large religious view' she listed 'indestructability *(sic)* of soul - survival after death'.[21] Death is only bodily death, not death of the soul; perhaps the 'afterbirth' is the soul; Jung proposed that 'Christ himself is the perfect symbol of the hidden immortal within the mortal man.' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 121) Her own comment on the interconnectedness of the images is the most helpful, but demonstrates the extreme complexity of the processes involved in making these connections. The 'ability to make remote or indirect connections' is an illustration of originality. (Kneller 1966, p. 64) There may also be an esoteric or idiosyncratic meaning which we cannot uncover.

In this poem, Plath combines the Platonic concept of reincarnation with the Christian concept of resurrection, and

notes the significance of their creators: 'These are people that were important--'. The use of the two different tenses of verb here is interesting: perhaps she considers that the concepts associated with them are no longer of relevance. The poem contains a number of images which occur throughout Plath's work, for example, the 'eye' in 'the loneliness of its eye'; this raises the question of whether it is the 'I' or the 'eye' which is lonely, or whether, in looking inwards, the loneliness is perceived. Water imagery occurs in 'drowned fields', land overtaken by water, perhaps the self overtaken by the unconscious but noted only at 'nightfall' and hence perhaps accessible only in dreams.

The theme of rebirth is implicit in the diurnal movement of the sun: 'Dawn gilds the farmers' and the world 'is blood-hot and personal/Dawn says, with its blood-flush', a theme continued in a slightly oblique fashion in the lines:

> There is no terminus, only suitcases
> Out of which the same self unfolds like a suit.

Suitcases imply travelling, perhaps the journey through life, but the body is not renewed, it is 'bald and shiny' like an old suit, rebirth of the soul rather than reincarnation. The mirror of 'folding mirrors' implies either a need in the speaker to perceive herself and thus to know her own reality, or a duality of the self. However, because they are 'folding', this suggests that there is no longer a need to view the self in the mirror,

there is no longer this duality; I discuss this further in the chapters on rebirth.

A specific Platonic influence is far less easy to detect than the Arnoldian and Shakespearean influences. However, we know that Plath read Plato and wrote on him; we know that he wrote on reincarnation, and it is therefore feasible to conclude that as with other texts, Plath adopted certain themes and images, in this instance, specifically the notion of the separable soul from *Gorgias*; she would also have received reinforcement of the importance of the rebirth theme from other texts.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to give detailed consideration to the thematic influences which certain texts may have had on Plath's work. In connection with 'The Forsaken Merman', I noted the early influence that poetry appeared to have on Plath, and it is worth, at this point, considering briefly the source of Plath's fascination with words:

> writing makes me a small god: I re-create the flux and smash of the world through the small ordered word patterns I make. (*Journals*, p. 131)

We should note Plath's sense of dominance, her perception of herself as in control of a world through her writing, a world she sees as chaotic. This fascination stems from a significant event which occurred at an earlier age than her first hearing of Arnold poem:

Mossberg argues that Plath came to regard 'words as nurture': when nursing Warren, Plath's brother, Aurelia Plath set up letter-games for her daughter; Plath perceived words as the substitute for maternal love.[22] Success in these games earned her mother's approval. In her later psychiatric treatment with Dr Ruth Beuscher, Plath recognised this:

> Old need of giving Mother accomplishments, getting reward of love. (*Journals*, p. 277)

Mrs Plath recalls that, as a young girl, Plath 'was writing rhymes constantly and making sketches to accompany them, which she hid under my napkin to surprise me when I came home from teaching' (*Letters*, p. 30); the verses had to be offered to her mother. From this early learning, Plath began to equate approval for her writing with being published; she questioned why she was 'obsessed with the idea I can justify myself by getting manuscripts published' (*Journals*, p. 33); no longer was it sufficient merely to offer her work to her mother, approval was now needed from a wider audience. She also came to terms with this during her treatment:

> It is not that I myself do not want to succeed. I do. But I do not need success with the desperation I have felt for it: that is an infusion of fear that successlessness means no approval from Mother: and approval, with Mother, has been equated for me with love, however true that is. (*Journals*, p. 279)

In the final months of her life, Plath came to accept and acknowledge her own abilities. She wrote to her mother on 16 October 1962:

> I am a genius of a writer: I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name . . . . (*Journals*, p. 355)

I believe that at this point Plath had achieved the birth of her self, she had engaged in the natural transformative process of individuation, as I discuss in the chapters on rebirth.

This theme of rebirth, together with that of loss, were the themes I noted as predominant in 'The Forsaken Merman', together with the water imagery which was associated with the former.

> The poetry of fairytale, whose magic is felt even by the adult, rests not least upon the fact that some of the old theories are still alive in our unconscious. We experience a strange and mysterious feeling whenever a fragment of our remotest youth stirs into life again, not actually reaching consciousness, but merely shedding a reflection of its emotional intensity on the conscious mind. (Jung 17, pp. 24-25)

This explains Plath's own emotions, the feeling of strangeness which she recalled with such clarity on hearing Arnold's poem: 'I wanted to cry; I felt very odd' (*Dreams*, p. 118) and offers an explanation of her continuing fascination with the themes explicated in this poem.

In discussion of *The Tempest*, I noted a similar preoccupation with the themes of 'loss and restoration' (Knight 1932, p. 263), again with the associated water imagery. Finally, in discussion of some of Plato's work, I noted that Plath's own comments on the philosopher gave an indication of her awareness of the concept of the separable soul and of her continuing interest in the theme of rebirth, a metaphor she used in connection with the writing of a poem:

> Slowly, with great hurt, like giving birth to some endless and primeval baby, I lie and let the sensations spring up, look at themselves and record themselves in words . . . (*Journals*, p. 162)

We should remember that Plath experienced these texts at significant ages: 'The Forsaken Merman' as a young child, *The Tempest* at the onset of puberty, and the Plato texts at the entry into young adulthood.

In addition to the themes of rebirth and loss and as a final comment on the influential texts, it is possible to discern a further link between the texts: that link is the soul. Socrates proposes that the soul is symbolised by three figures, firstly, that of a fabulous monster to which are added the figures of a lion and a man (Plato [trans. Cornford] 1941, p. 309). In *The Tempest* we can see the three figures represented as follows: Caliban is depicted as a monster, he is, 'in some sense, a sea monster' (Knight 1932, p. 258); Ariel is a 'brave spirit' (I.2.206), and a 'nymph o'th'sea' (I.2.301) but his name also has a different translation, it is "lion of God";[23] can we then assume that Prospero is the man? If so, then we have the three Socratic figures representing the soul. Socrates notes certain characteristics of the soul and points out it must be born in mind:

> . . . how dfferent she would become if wholly following this superior principle, and borne by a divine impulse out of the ocean in which she now is, and disengaged from the stones and shells . . . (Plato, *The Republic*, [translated by Jowett], 611e, p. 489)[24]

We can surely read this as the sea as the medium of rebirth of the soul.

Socrates describes the soul thus:

> . . . we have seen her only in a condition which may be compared to that of the sea-god Glaucus, whose original

> nature could hardly be discerned by those who saw him because his natural members were either broken off or crushed and damaged by the waves in all sorts of ways, and incrustations had grown over them of seaweed and shells and stones . . . (Plato *ibid.* 611c and d, p. 488)

It is interesting that Socrates describes the soul as 'she', as does Jung (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 26). Trinculo describes Caliban thus:

> What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish! He smells like a fish; a very ancient and fishlike smell . . . A strange fish! (II.2.24-27)

Here there would seem to be a possible link between the soul and stone imagery. One of the difficulties of this thesis has been to discover Plath's source of stone imagery: in 'The Forsaken Merman' there are only the graves 'the stones worn with rains' while in *The Tempest* the only reference is the line: 'My cellar is in a rock by th'seaside (II.2.131-2), neither of which can be seen as explanatory. Trinculo sees Caliban as a fish monster, Socrates the soul as like Glaucus, a sea god, and like Glaucus buried beneath weed, rock, shell. Is it possible that Plath viewed the stone as her totem, the repository of her soul?

THREE

IMAGES OF STONE

Introduction

At the end of the preceding chapter I suggested that Sylvia Plath could have regarded the stone as her totem, the repository of her soul: the stone becomes a symbolic representation, 'an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way' (Jung 15, p. 70); we cannot know exactly what Plath intuited by her use of the stone image, such an image 'remains a perpetual challenge to our thoughts and feelings', (Jung 15, p. 77). In the *Letters* she notes that, in connection with her thesis topic at Smith College, she was reading 'Freud, Frazer, Jung, and others' (*Letters*, p. 146); she was given a copy of *The Golden Bough* by her mother (*Letters*, p. 145), and in this text, Frazer notes that on entrance to a certain secret society in New Britain 'every man receives a stone in the shape either of a human being or of an animal, and henceforth his soul is believed to be knit up in a manner with the stone.' (Frazer 1924, p. 680)

At this point, we should consider interpretations of the word 'soul' from sources Plath studied. Crombie suggests the following as Plato's interpretation of the soul:

> In the *Phaedo* it is officially that which animates a body; but it is tacitly assumed both that this is something rational, and that it is something personal, i.e. something capable of desires, emotions, purposes. . . . the soul seems to be . . . that part of his personal life with which a man identifies himself.' (Crombie 1964, pp. 77-8)

This corresponds approximately to the Jungian definition of the soul as 'the *living* in man, that which lives of itself and causes life' (Jung 1940, p. 75). It is 'a clearly demarcated functional complex that can best be described as a "personality."' (Jung 6, p. 463) Jung elaborates this definition to include the soul as *persona* and as *anima*. The 'functional complex' is the outer attitude to the outer object, and hence results in different reactions to different environments leading to the description 'angel abroad, devil at home'; by contrast, the *persona* is the outer attitude to the inner object, this latter being defined as the unconscious, and results in the wearing of 'masks'; the *anima* is the inward face: it 'usually contains all those common human qualities which the conscious attitude lacks' and it is, 'by and large, *complementary* to the character of the *persona*.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 464 ff). Such definitions may have formed part of Plath's background knowledge.

If we now turn to the stone, in his discussion of a mandala drawn by a woman patient, Jung notes that 'the stone in this case signifies the new centre of personality, the self' (Jung 9, p. 363). This concept is discussed at greater length in M-L von Franz's essay, 'The Process of Individuation':

> For while the human being is as different as possible from a stone, yet man's innermost center is in a strange and special way akin to it (perhaps because the stone symbolizes mere existence at the farthest remove from the emotions, feelings, fantasies, and discursive thinking of ego-consciousness). In this sense the stone symbolizes what is perhaps the simplest and deepest experience--the experience of something eternal that man can have in those moments when he feels immortal and unalterable. (Jung 1978, p. 224).

This gives two interpretations of the stone image, as non-feeling, and as representative of the enduring quality in a human being. Jung offers seven different representations of the stone and its transformation at the end of his chapter 'Concerning Rebirth':

> 1 as the resurrection of the *homo philosophicus* . . .
> 2 as the human soul . . .
> 3 as a being below and above man . . .
> 4 as life . . .
> 5 as the resurrection of the dead . . .
> 6 as the Virgin Mary . . .
> 7 as man himself . . . (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 134)

These interpretations are taken from texts on alchemy: Jung believed that analytical psychology coincided with this medieval discipline:

> The experiences of the alchemists were, in a sense, my experiences, and their world was my world. This was, of course, a momentous discovery: I had stumbled upon the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious. (Jung 1963, p. 196)

Jung believed he had traced the source of his psychological theory. Given that part of his theory is the concept of the collective unconscious, we can understand why he should describe this as 'a momentous discovery'.

The stone can be 'transformed', such a transformation being noted by Jung in his discussion of the inner voice. The alchemists 'projected the inner event (the inner voice) into an outer figure, so for them the inner friend appeared in the form of the "Stone"' and they also saw the response, the inner voice, in the transformation of the chemical substance, so 'if one of them sought transformation, he discovered it outside in matter'.

(Jung 9, Part 1, pp. 133-4) Plath may have read this particular section of Jung's work: we can only be certain that she read at least some part of the volume *The Development of Personality.*'

Examples of stone imagery occur throughout Plath's work, including the juvenilia. She did not receive her copy of *The Golden Bough* until 1953,[2] and was reading this and Jung at the same time in 1954 (*Letters*, pp. 145 and 146); since her use of the stone image predates these years, such texts must have supplied reinforcement of the viability of the image, rather than the source itself. A Jungian might construe this as evidence of archetypal images from within the collective unconscious. In her novel *The Bell Jar* Plath offers different interpretations of the stone.

A significant reference concerns the ski-ing incident:

> People and trees receded on either hand like the dark sides of a tunnel as I hurtled on to the still, bright point at the end of it, the pebble at the bottom of the well, the white sweet baby cradled in its mother's belly. (*Bell*, p. 102)

The pebble is the source from which Esther will develop, it represents 'a reduction to a core, stripped of all pretence and association, the low point from which a gradual ascent is eventually possible.' (Aird 1979, p. 65) Plath wrote to Olive Higgins Prouty in late 1962:

> . . . to have known the bottom, whether mental or emotional, is a great trial, but also a great gift' (cited in Wagner 1984, p. 16)

To descend to that innermost centre is the 'trial'; the 'gift' is to be able to ascend from that point.

> Dreams of falling down into a hole, "going under," looking back, sliding from a narrow space into an opening are all ways of beginning the search for what is missing. (Hall 1980, p. 24)

Esther is recognising a lack within herself. In another instance, Plath uses the stone image for words themselves. Dr Gordon says to Esther:

> 'Suppose you try and tell me what you think is wrong.'
>
> I turned the words over suspiciously, like round, sea-polished pebbles that might suddenly put out a claw and change into something else. (*Bell*, p. 137)

It seems that, in Esther's view, the stones, the words, could be transformed, and she views such a transformation as a threat, 'a claw'. The words themselves are threatening, and Esther explores this, concluding that 'it made it sound as if nothing was *really* wrong, I only *thought* it was wrong.' (*ibid.*) She perceives Dr Gordon as suggesting that it is her thought processes which are at fault. A further reference to stones occurs at the moment when Esther loses consciousness in her suicide attempt:

> The silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. (*Bell*, p. 179)

Here there is an obvious link with the Platonic concept of the soul as being like Glaucus, covered in 'the clinging overgrowth of weed and rock and shell,' (Plato [ed. Jowett], p. 488); Esther appears to believe, at this point, that it was her soul which was being exposed.

Joan's eyes are described as 'two grey, goggly pebbles' (*Bell*, p. 228), the stone becomes an 'eye', or perhaps an 'I'. In the incident with the young boy on the beach the child 'kicked over a

few stones, as if searching for something' (*Bell*, p. 162), possibly a search for insight. Perhaps in this child--we should note that it is a boy--Plath is remembering her own associations of sea, and stone, and the birth of her brother. Did she, in fact, view this childhood event as a loss of identity, as well as an awareness of the *separateness* of things? Plath describes her emotions thus:

> As from a star I saw, coldly and soberly, the *separateness* of everything. I felt the wall of my skin: I am I. That stone is a stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over. . . . I stubbed my toe on the round, blind stones. They paid no notice. They didn't care. I supposed they were happy. (*Dreams*, pp. 120-121)

The greatest significance of the above comment, made with hindsight in 1962, is that the event to which it referred can be viewed as forming the basis of Plath's stone imagery: this recognition of otherness is a part of every child's growing awareness:

> . . . it is years before the child ceases to confuse itself with the universe. (Fromm 1942, p. 21)

Plath appears, at least in her own retrospective view, to be achieving this awareness at an early age. At this point, she perceives the stone as external; in later work, this image is internalised. In the *Journals* she recorded: 'Cried with the old stone-deep gloom with R.B. yesterday.' (*Journals*, p. 294) This implies a despair that penetrates to the very centre of her being. The stone is the essence of herself, that from which she can only ascend and grow; in China, 'a seed is thought of as a "pregnant" stone'. (Hall 1980, p 36)

The *separateness* which she notes links with an earlier comment in the *Journals*, made when she was at Yaddo in 1959:

> That greenhouse is a mine of subjects. . . . Tools: rakes, hoes, brooms, shovels. The superb identity, selfhood of things. (*Journals*, p. 323)

This latter comment seems one of pleasure: 'superb'. The separateness of the human and non-human is to be wondered at, yet the comment made in 1962 appears to be the opposite, Plath regretted that the two were not one. The 1959 comment was made at a significant time: the sequence 'Poem for a Birthday' was composed while she was at Yaddo, pregnant with her first child; the state of pregnancy is a consciousness of more than one meaning, since there is always the child to take into account. (Hall 1980, p. 88) Plath was also aware of a rebirth of herself. In the 1962 comment, Plath observes the stones as 'blind', they lack sight; or is this a lack of insight? Because of this lack, they cannot feel pain, they are unseeing and uncaring; they 'paid no notice': they did not care. She supposes they were happy. This links with the passage quoted earlier:

> . . . the stone symbolizes mere existence at the farthest remove from the emotions, feelings, fantasies, and discursive thinking of ego-consciousness. (Jung 1978, p. 224)

It appears that for Plath the qualities of insight and a sensitivity to others are the sources of pain at this particular moment. She is also perhaps perceiving the stone as the 'eye' or 'I', the image used in *The Bell Jar*.

To summarise, Jung has offered a number of definitions of the stone from alchemical sources; he perceived himself as a stone:

'the stone which was also myself' (Jung 1963, p. 39). From the comment made of the effect on her of her brother's birth, Plath views the stone as lacking insight, uncaring, separate, but there is a degree of ambiguity in her interpretation of the image: the stone can represent the 'eye', or 'I', and hence insight, but it can also represent 'blindness', the non-feeling state exemplified by a lack of insight. In the following sections, I shall examine her work in detail to discover how this image of the stone develops and changes.

Juvenilia

The images of the stone that occur in Plath's early work are less focussed than in the later poems; there is a degree of ambiguity which is resolved as her writing matures. In 'Sonnet: To Eva' (*Poems*, p. 304), the skull is likened to a time-piece that can be broken:

> All right, let's say you could take a skull and break it
> The way you'd crack a clock; you'd crush the bone
> Between steel palms of inclination, take it,
> Observing the wreck of metal and rare stone.

The contents of the skull are the inside workings of the clock, the 'wreck of metal and rare stone'. This is ambiguous: it could refer to the jewels of the clock, or it could be that the essence of the clock is apparent, possibly a metaphor for the essence of the human being. Jung, commenting on the contrast of Eastern and Western symbols of transformation, notes:

> We have only just discovered the precious stone; we have still to polish it. (Jung 1940, p. 41)

A similar ambiguity is apparent in the villanelle 'Never try to trick me with a kiss' (*Poems*, p. 319) in the line: 'A stone can masquerade where no heart is'. This could be interpreted as heartless in the sense of uncaring, or in the sense of without life. In this poem, Plath contrasts the stone with the heart, living matter, a contrast which occurs in other poems. For example in 'Touch-and-Go' (*Poems*, p. 335), the stone provides the background for, and contrast to, the human experience:

> Sing praise for statuary:
> For those anchored attitudes
> And staunch stone eyes that stare
> Through lichen-lid and passing bird-foot
> At some steadfast mark
> Beyond the inconstant green
> Gallop and flick of light
> In this precarious park . . .
>
> And I, like the children, caught
> In the mortal active verb
> Let my transient eye break a tear
> For each quick, flaring game
> Of child, leaf and cloud,
> While on this same fugue, unmoved,
> Those stonier eyes look,
> Safe-socketed in rock.

The statuary is seen as constant, with fixed gaze, its 'staunch' eyes are contrasted with the 'transient' eye of the subjective speaker. The 'stonier eyes' of the final stanza appear to be envied by the 'I' of the poem--and there is the word play on 'I' and 'eye'. A key phrase is 'safe-socketed in rock': rock and stone are equated and essentially, the rock is a place of safety. The human eyes render meaning to the scene:

> Let my transient eye break a tear
> For each quick, flaring game
> Of child, leaf and cloud,

whereas the eyes of the statuary look 'on this same fugue, unmoved'. The I-speaker regards the state of being a statue as safe. In contrast to the human, feeling state, the stony state is desirable. Or is it that a lack of insight, a state of self-ignorance, is more acceptable than an exploration of the inner self?

In 'Doom of Exiles' (*Poems*, p. 318) the stone image and the metaphor of sleep are combined: 'when nearing the goal of rebirth of some kind, sleep will overtake the hero/heroine' (Hall 1980, p. 66); in view of the context of this poem--it was the first Plath wrote after her breakdown (*Letters*, p. 136)--it must be considered significant. Rebirth in this poem does not seem to be a matter for rejoicing, since 'doom' implies an unpleasant fate, and 'exiles' a loss. This entire poem is a metaphor for a mental breakdown and rebirth; the 'colossal sleep' is both the state induced by the treatment, and possibly the state of the I-speaker prior to that treatment, the state of self-ignorance. In this instance, 'colossal' can be interpreted as being of great size and of stone: the speaker is waking to a new state of being, having emerged from the unfeeling state of stone. The implication is that the speaker has undergone a change, a change in her mind, but this change is not pleasant:

> Now we, returning from the vaulted domes
> Of our colossal sleep, come home to find
> A tall metropolis of catacombs
> Erected down the gangways of our mind.
>
> Green alleys where we revelled have become
> The infernal haunt of demon dangers.

Yet in spite of this fear, in spite of the wish to return to the state prior to the exile:

> Backward we traveled to reclaim the day
> Before we fell, like Icarus, undone

the positive emerges in the final couplet:

> Still, stubbornly we try to crack the nut
> In which the riddle of our race is shut.

The rebirth brings with it a sense of shock:

> All we find are altars in decay
> And profane words scrawled black across the sun

but the speaker believes there is some truth which will reveal the purpose, perhaps of existence itself, which will answer the eternal 'why', 'the riddle of our race'.

The use of church imagery, 'vaulted', 'catacombs', 'seraph', 'altars' points towards resurrection as being the form of rebirth in this poem, a form Plath used with such effect in the later poem, 'Lady Lazarus'. There is another point of note to be made on Plath's use of religious imagery, imagery which occurs throughout her work: Jung noted that 'the psyche spontaneously produces images with a religious content, that it is "by nature religious."' (Jung 1963, p. 13) For Plath, such images would have been derived from her early religious education; one of her biographers tells us that 'Sundays meant services at the Unitarian Church', (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 37) where she may have become aware of the passage from the New Testament, in which individuals are referred to as 'lively stones'. (I Peter 2, 5)

In a later poem, 'Prologue to Spring' (*Poems*, p. 322) Plath brings together some of her different interpretations of the stone image, and thus points ahead to issues which will preoccupy her in later work. The title indicates a state immediately preceding the rebirth season as does the opening line: 'The winter landscape hangs in balance now'. As in the later 'Hardcastle Crags', stone imagery predominates throughout this poem: winter is likened to the gorgon's stare, turning all it 'sees' to stone, the 'skaters freeze within a stone tableau.' The very air becomes of stone: 'the quartz atmosphere', and the 'stone tableau' of the first stanza is echoed in the line: 'Repose of sculpture'. There does not seem to be any sense of threat here, in contrast to that suggested by Laing's definition of petrification, a 'particular form of terror, whereby one is petrified, i.e. turned to stone' (Laing 1960, p. 48). The I-speaker views the winter as a period of suspended animation:

> What countermagic can undo the snare
> Which has stopped the season in its tracks
> And suspended all that might occur?

There is a sense of some external force at work with 'countermagic': this suspension of life is beyond the control of woman or man.

> The symbolism of judgement, death, and rebirth is correlated with the twelfth hour of the night, with midnight, and also with the midnight of the year, the winter solstice, when the sun reaches the lowest point in its path. (Neumann 1955, p. 177n)

Plath noted in her journal the significance of her 'winter': 'I have gone through my winter solstice, and the dying god of life

and fertility is reborn.' (*Journals*, p. 69) Here, the natural movement of the seasons becomes the metaphor for her own rebirth.

'Green-singing birds explode from all the rocks.' In this, the final line of the poem, 'rocks' refer not only to the actual stones of the landscape, but to the 'stone tableau' and the 'repose of sculpture'; rocks and stone hold the key to rebirth: it is from this state of petrification, that rebirth is possible. Green, for Plath, was 'the colour of life and eggs and sugar fluid'. (*Journals*, p. 310) At this particular point in her writing career, it appears that Plath viewed the stone image not as threatening in Laing's sense of petrification quoted above, but as a desirable state, the necessary prelude to rebirth. In this particular poem, the rebirth is indirect, Jung's fifth definition, participation in the process of transformation:[3]

> The fifth and last form is indirect rebirth. Here the transformation is brought about not directly, by passing through death and rebirth oneself, but indirectly, by participating in a process of transformation which is conceived of as taking place outside the individual. In other words, one has to witness, or take part in, some rite of transformation. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 114)

The seasonal transformation of the landscape is the rite of transformation in which we are asked to participate: the rising and setting of the sun, the seasons of spring and autumn are symbols for human experiences (Bodkin 1934, p. 85). Is the speaker of the poem perceiving the possibility of her own transformation? In this poem, Plath is beginning to focus her use of the stone image, linking it with the rebirth theme.

It is important to note that because these poems are all dated prior to 1956, clearly Plath's preoccupation with the image of stone and the theme of rebirth predates her meeting with Hughes, and largely predates her reading of Graves' *The White Goddess* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*; her use of this theme contradicts Rosenblatt's assertion that the 'thematic substance of the apprentice poems is completely dominated by visions of despair and death.' (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 53) It is clear that the theme of rebirth, together with the image of stone and, as will be shown later, water, was an important factor in the shaping of Plath's work; as has already been shown, such a theme was perceived at an early age and was reinforced by reading and study throughout her life.

To summarise this section, by the end of 1955, the end of the *Juvenilia* (see Appendix 1), Plath gives the stone image different interpretations: it can be viewed as the soul; it is seen as constant, fixed, in contrast with the transience of the individual; and rebirth is preceded by a stone-like state. Plath is also beginning to explore different forms of rebirth, notably indirect rebirth and resurrection. At this stage, she uses stone and rock interchangeably. In 'Touch-and-Go' (*Poems*, p. 335):

> Those stonier eyes look,
> Safe-socketed in rock.

Rock and stone are perceived as states of safety, non-threatening to the individual. Rosenblatt suggests that Plath makes use of 'stone and pebbles to indicate the world of death (Rosenblatt

1979, p. 37); this seems too generalised a statement to cover an image to which Plath gives several interpretations.

The Colossus Years

I have suggested that by the end of 1955, Plath's stone imagery was becoming more focussed. We could expect that, during the years in which she wrote the poems included in *The Colossus*, she would develop the image further. In the following section, I shall briefly discuss certain poems in which the image occurs, and then analyse in greater detail poems which are significant to Plath's development of this image.

Plath uses the contrast of rock with life in two early poems. 'Conversation Among the Ruins' (*Poems*, p. 21), and 'Winter Landscape, with Rooks' (*Poems*, p. 21.); the former is based on a painting by de Chirico (*Poems*, p. 275).

> Fractured pillars frame prospects of rock;
> While you stand heroic in coat and tie, I sit
> Composed in Grecian tunic and psyche-knot.

The rocky landscape is viewed through the broken stone framework in which sits the I-speaker, who is 'composed', yet with a 'psyche-knot': the outer appearance is contrasted with the inner. The word play on 'psyche-knot' suggests the complexity of the human mind, a theme used in 'Winter Landscape, with Rooks' (*Poems*, p. 21) of which Plath noted that it was 'a psychic landscape' (*Journals*, p. 106). Others have suggested that Plath 'conveys her inner mood in terms of some outdoor scene' (Newlin

1972, p. 372). The ending of 'Winter Landscape, with Rooks' suggests that there is no comfort, no life-giving force to be found in a rocky landscape:

> . . . what solace
> can be struck from rock to make heart's waste
> grow green again? Who'd walk in this bleak place?

We should consider what may have been Plath's interpretation of rock as opposed to stone. In this poem she is suggesting that there is no solace to be found in the rocks of the mind, the mental barriers which impede an emotional response; by implication we have to overcome these barriers. At this point, the image of rock is, for Plath, a representation of a barrier in the psychic landscape.

The contrast of rock and the human being appears in 'Pursuit' (*Poems*, p. 22), of which Plath noted: 'wrote a full-page poem about the dark forces of lust' (*Journals*, p. 116); in the *Letters*, she added that it was

> a symbol of the terrible beauty of death, and the paradox that the more intensely one lives, the more one burns and consumes oneself; death, here, includes the concept of love, and is larger and richer than mere love, which is part of it. (*Letters*, p. 222).

'Flayed by thorns I trek the rocks': the rocks appear to symbolise the problems of life, and the I-speaker is suggesting perhaps, that the barbs of criticism are the source of the problem. Plath uses the verb 'flay' in connection with her writing: 'what a poet I will flay myself into.' (*Journals*, p. 223) Her own self-criticism will generate her art. In her notes on Jung, Plath copied the following:

> Instead of being at the mercy of wild beasts, earthquakes, landslides and inundations, modern man is battered by the elemental forces of his own psyche. (Jung 17, p. 177)

This image of the rock as a representation of life's problems occurs in her early work, for example, in 'Trio of Love Songs' (*Poems*, p. 313), in the line: 'Major faults in granite/mark a mortal lack'. We can see that such natural disasters can become the metaphor of human problems of the mind, and it seems feasible that this passage from Jung reinforced Plath's use of the natural landscape as metaphor for the psychic landscape.

For Plath, rock also has an apparent protective quality. In 'Departure' (*Poems*, p. 51), it is a 'spit shielding the town's blue bay'. If we take rock as constituting a barrier, then this barrier is a shield against the sea; water is often considered to represent the unconscious, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, and the barrier is therefore preventing the individual from understanding herself, from moving into her own inner depths. The 'protective' quality is thus limiting the individual.

In contrast to the image of rock as a bar to self-understanding, stone appears to represent not only that from which such self-understanding might develop, as discussed in the previous section on the *Juvenilia*, but also past life, 'hoard faith safe in a fossil': 'Epitaph for Fire and Flower' (*Poems*, p. 45). Plath's response to the image of the stone is still developing. This poem also contains a reference to the lack of insight of the stone:

Seek no stony camera-eye to fix
The passing dazzle of each face
In black and white.

The camera can merely record that to which it is directed; it cannot respond to feelings, it can only record signs of such feelings. Of six poems, including 'Dream with Clam-Diggers' and 'Epitaph for Fire and Flower', Plath wrote in October 1956 that 'they are all my *new* poems, written after "Pursuit" and glorifying love and Ted. . . . And they are *happy* poems (*Letters*, p. 274). Perhaps we can interpret this as meaning that Plath was happy to be writing of her early exploration of herself, that she was beginning to recognise the possibility of defining herself in terms of her poetic art.

The first of the significant poems in terms of stone imagery is undoubtedly 'Hardcastle Crags' (*Poems*, p. 62) where such imagery governs the whole poem, and in which Plath provides a contrast between the many stone images and the fragility of human life which itself contains an element of stone, the 'quartz grit' of the final stanza. This contrast of the human with the natural relates Plath directly to Emily Dickinson who, with Melville was 'struck by the definitive disjunctions which may exist between man and nature, or man and god, or man and fellow man.' (Chase 1955, p. 79)

The whole tone of the poem is set by the opening lines:

Flintlike, her feet struck
Such a racket of echoes from the steely street . . .

This reverses expectations, since it is more usually the steel that generates the spark from the stationary stone; is the I-speaker likening herself to stone, or assuming that a part of her is stone? At this point in the poem it is not clear, but becomes clear in the final lines, she is 'quartz grit'. Throughout the poem, the human is set up in opposition to stone:

> All the night gave her, in return
> For the paltry gift of her bulk and the beat
> Of her heart, was the humped indifferent iron
> Of its hills, and its pastures bordered by black stone set
> On black stone.

The landscape is unresponsive to the I-speaker. In contrast with the earlier poem, the landscape is stone rather than rock, and therefore not a barrier to personal development, but there is threat, the landscape is enough 'to snuff the quick/Of her small heat out'; it is oppressive: 'the weight/Of stones and hills of stones'. The threat is perhaps in this power to dominate, or to be overwhelmed; the speaker is also of stone but 'mere quartz grit', stone in its smallest form, shattered, perhaps representative of the fragmented nature of the personality before it becomes whole again, before it is reborn. In this poem, rock does not figure despite an obviously rocky landscape. The stone image is all-pervasive, as if it is the essential force behind not only present life, but past life:

> The whole landscape
> Loomed absolute as the antique world was
> Once, in its earliest sway of lymph and sap,
> Unaltered by eyes . . .

While there is no suggestion that the eyes referred to are the stony gaze of earlier poems, nevertheless, it is significant that

it is the eyes that are capable of altering a landscape: insight can transform the mental processes, can alter perception.

In 'Hardcastle Crags' the fragility of the human, in this instance presumed female, was contrasted with the power of the landscape: even the light was 'stony'; in 'The Great Carbuncle' (*Poems*, p. 72) the light becomes the transforming element: 'a light neither of dawn//Nor nightfall' which alters earth's fundamental property:

> . . . Gravity's
> Lost in the life and drift of
> An easier element
> Than earth . . .

Here the light transfigures the landscape and the human figures therein but with the withdrawal of that light, chairs, 'tables drop/Down' so, too, does the body, it 'weighs like stone'. This could, of course, refer to the pull of gravity. Or it could be that, in fading, the light is absorbed into the landscape and the human and animal life on it. This luminosity is that which rendered the 'once-known way' as:

> Wholly other, and ourselves
> Estranged, changed, suspended where
> Angels are rumored . . .

Is Plath implying that this transfiguration is also a transcendence of the earthly, almost an appearance of the soul in tangible form?

Aurelia Plath tells us that early in her writing career, her daughter learnt the importance of final lines:

> . . . Sylvia discovered that her exuberant, joyous outbursts in both poetry and prose brought rejection slips, while the

> story or poem with pathetic twist was found more acceptable. (*Letters*, p. 35)

In 'Lorelei' (*Poems*, p. 94) while the final lines do not have a 'pathetic twist, they are significant:

> O river, I see drifting
>
> Deep in your flux of silver
> Those great goddesses of peace
> Stone, stone, ferry me down there.

Here the I-speaker sees calmness of spirit in the depths of the water; her appeal to the stone can be viewed as an internal cry to her own soul, thus the I-speaker is viewing the soul as separable from the body, the Platonic concept. Neumann wrote that 'renewal is possible only through the death of the old personality' (Neumann 1955, p. 292). The I-speaker sees the stone, her soul, as being the source of inner peace. While water can be seen as the medium of birth, and hence the medium of a metaphoric rebirth, if we view it as symbolising the unconscious, the I-speaker has to go into her own unconscious to find peace. Here Plath is focussing the stone image to indicate the soul.

Of 'Child's Park Stones' (*Poems*, p. 100) Plath noted that this syllabic poem had the stones 'juxtaposed to the ephemeral orange and fuchsia azaleas' (*Journals*, p. 235); again, the stone is contrasted with living matter, here the fragility of the flowers. These stones are 'lobed, warped', they 'loom in the leaf-filtered gloom', they 'guard a dark repose'. This suggests the same sense of threat contained in 'Hardcastle Crags', yet there is also the sense of protection; they are unchanging, they 'keep their shadows intact while sun/Alters shadows of rose and iris'. '"The

stone has no uncertainties, no urge to communicate, and is eternally the same for thousands of years."' (Jung 1963, p. 53)

The essence of the stone, the 'still heart' can be found by following

> . . . the light's tint
> And intensity by midnight
> By noon and throughout the brunt
> Of various weathers . . .

This constant quality of the stone is contrasted with the changing quality of the light and with the changing of the seasons:

> Stones that take the whole summer to lose
> Their dream of the winter's cold; stones
> Warming at core only as
>
> Frost forms. No man's crowbar could
> Uproot them: their beards are ever-
> Green. Nor do they, once in a hundred
> Years, go down to drink the river:
> No thirst disturbs a stone's bed.

The stone is oblivious to that which haunts the individual, the changing seasons, here a metaphor for life's experiences; the stone cannot be moved by the individual, it is not subject to the individual's needs; it has no need of the river, no need of water. It is immortal. The body is that which requires renewal, not the soul. The lines 'their beards are ever-/Green' imply that living matter is attached to the soul; this links with the Socratic description of the soul as being like the sea-god Glaucus quoted earlier.

In 'Poems, Potatoes' (*Poems*, p. 106) word and line are sturdy 'as potatoes/Stones, without conscience': the stone is lacking in sensitivity to others, a quality which for the I-speaker in other

poems, causes pain. It is also interesting to appreciate the irony of the opening line, that the 'word, defining, muzzles'; it could be argued that this supports a poet's use of metaphor, since figurative speech does not define so specifically. With poems such as 'Child's Park Stones', 'Lorelei' and 'Poems, Potatoes', Plath's use of stone imagery is becoming more focussed, although never perfectly so, but we might expect that the individual meaning of such imagery would become clearer, and that from this individualistic, sometimes idiosyncratic approach, the poet would be enabled to move to more universal meanings. Such a move is apparent in 'Man in Black'.

Plath noted that 'Man in Black' (*Poems*, p. 119) was 'the only "love" poem in my book' (*Journals*, p. 300); in this poem the stones are white in opposition to the 'dead/Black coat, black shoes, and your/Black hair'. In contrast to 'Departure' where the 'rock spit' shielded the bay, in 'Man in Black' there is 'a great stone spit/Bared by each falling tide': the water reveals that which can lie hidden, perhaps the unconscious as revealing the hidden self. In this poem the 'you' is an all-powerful being. Plath commented that the '"dead black" in my poem ["Man in Black"] may be a transference from the visit to my father's grave' (*Journals*, p. 300) and in view of this, it seems fair to suppose that she was thinking of her father at this time--this all-powerful being is capable of 'riveting stones, air,/All of it, together'; the Prospero/Miranda relationship is called to mind. This physical landscape has its parallel in the psychic

landscape of the speaker; perhaps the stones in the above quotation are representative of the soul, the air the body. Is the man in black therefore the guiding force which controls human life, or is it a personal representation of Plath's own fear of external control, or is this poem a recognition of male power? We should note Plath's use of quotation marks in '"love" poem': this is ambiguous in that the 'love' could be self-love, or love as a state of nothingness.

There are a number of contrasts involved in the poem: black/white, live/dead, male/female. If this is representative of the speaker's state of mind, then the dead, black, male figure is in opposition to her live, white, female personality. Perhaps this is a representation of Plath's own conflict of poet and woman, or perhaps it is the opposition of head and heart, intellect and emotion, a universalising of experience. As with so many of Plath's poems, there is an unresolved ambiguity; it is perhaps this quality which accounts in part for her enduring attraction as a poet.

> I am even prepared to suggest that there is in all great poetry, something which must remain unaccountable however complete might be our knowledge of the poet, and that that is what matters most. (Eliot 1957, p. 112)

Plath's images of stone and of water, and the theme of rebirth permeates her work, but she does not use them in a consistent fashion and it is left to her readers to interpret each poem:

> It is worth bearing in mind two simple points when approaching a writer like Sylvia Plath. The first is to recognise the impossibility of consistency. . . . The second point arises out of the first. Just as it is impossible to discover the 'truth' about anyone else's heart, so it is

impossible to have a single true reading of a work.'
(Bassnett 1987, pp. 5-6)

The year 1959 was a crucial one for Plath. In the early part of that year, she was working in Boston; during July to September she and Hughes were touring coast-to-coast; in September they were both at the writers' colony at Yaddo where Plath learnt she was pregnant with her first child and finally in December, both poets returned to London. There were two important poems written during this year, 'The Colossus' (*Poems*, p. 129) and 'Poem for a Birthday' (*Poems*, p. 131). The fact that Plath chose the former as the title of her first collection is indicative of the significance she attached to this poem, although with hindsight, 'Poem for a Birthday' is of greater importance thematically as this later poem points forward to concerns that will preoccupy Plath throughout her subsequent poetic career, whereas 'The Colossus' is a reflection on things past.

The title, 'The Colossus', provides an opening link with giant statuary, yet this statue is broken, 'I shall never get you put together entirely'. Throughout, the I-speaker is addressing the statue, and there is juxtaposing of female/male, the female being small 'like an ant in mourning' in contrast with the large male statue with its 'immense skull-plates'. The colossus strides dominions, and the I-speaker sees this giant, this male, as astride her life, her experience. But this colossus is no more, it is a ruin and there is sadness in the final lines:

My hours are married to shadow.
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.

The I-speaker has become separated from, and is no longer dependent on, the colossus, the figure from the past. It is interesting that the I-speaker should imply that she has been waiting for something to emerge from the water, she has been listening for 'the scrape of a keel'. We cannot judge whether whatever was expected has arrived or whether the I-speaker has abandoned her wait. Undoubtedly the phrase 'the blank stones' uses Plath's interpretation of the stone as non-feeling and clearly suggests the stones as she visualised them in 'Ocean 1212-W' (*Dreams*, p. 117) on the day her brother was born, 'this awful birthday of otherness'. (*Dreams*, p. 121). For Plath the stone can symbolise the otherness of human life: she equates it with unemotionality, not necessarily an inabililty to feel, but a lack of a need to feel. In this poem she equates the stone with the male and hence views the male as having this quality, or lack of it.

It was at the end of 1959 that Plath composed 'Poem for a Birthday' (*Poems*, p. 131) which has rebirth as the central preoccupation. Analysis of the entire sequence is included in Chapter Five; in this section I shall consider only 'The Stones', the final work in the 7-poem sequence, of which Plath said in a radio broadcast:

> The speaker has utterly lost her sense of identity and relationship to the world. She imagines herself quite graphically undergoing the process of rebirth like a statue that has been scattered and ground down only to be resurrected and pieced together centuries later. Her nightmare vision of waking in a modern hospital gradually softens as she recovers and accepts the frightening yet necessary ties of love which will heal and return her whole again to the world. (*The Living Poet*)

Her own words link the image of stone and the theme of rebirth. The I-speaker's concern with rebirth is sharply focussed, 'I shall be good as new'.

> The vase, reconstructed, houses
> The elusive rose.

A vessel is often a representation of the female, woman as womb capable of giving birth to herself. (Hall 1980, p. 49) In contrast with the broken statue of 'The Colossus', the vase is mended and is now fit frame for love. This love, says the I-speaker, 'is the bone and sinew of my curse'. This is ambiguous: love is seen as the most basic human requirement, a necessary tie, but the I-speaker is also aware that it can be a curse to require love to that degree. Alternatively, love can be seen as the emotion with which she will curse others; both interpretations suggest that love is a negative emotion.

Many of the more obscure images in 'The Stones' are direct references to Radin's *African Folktales*, for example, 'the city where men are mended' refers to a Hausa tale of two women, one 'good', one 'evil', who each have a daughter. After a meeting with the devil, the good woman's daughter is eaten by a hyena; the mother collects the bones and goes to the city where men are mended and because of her unselfishness, the daughter is mended. The evil woman kills her own daughter, she 'put her in a mortar, and began to pound her up' (Radin 1952, p. 251), which is re-written by Plath as the line: 'The mother of pestles diminished me'. This second woman shows selfishness on her journey to the city and her daughter is mended but deformed 'with one leg, one

buttock, one hand, the whole consisted of only one side' (Radin 1952, p. 252), and the mother denies her daughter. Another critic has pointed out that in the poem the I-speaker identifies herself with the evil woman's daughter (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 34): she sees herself as deformed, a deformity which will be changed by her rebirth:

> Many women undertake this . . . ritual withdrawal into the unknown self because they feel they are not beautiful. (Hall 1980, p. 34)

We know that Plath thought of herself as ugly, particularly at the time of her breakdown:

> Look at that ugly dead mask here and do not forget it. It is a chalk mask with dead dry poison behind it, like the death angel. . . . The pouting disconsolate mouth, the flat, bored, numb, expressionless eyes: symptoms of the foul decay within. [Written of a photograph of herself.] (*Journals*, p. 66)

Perhaps we can consider 'The Stones' as evidence of Plath's withdrawal into herself, the beginning of her inner voyage of discovery.

The imagery in 'The Stones' is powerful. There is the 'one stone eye' which the jewelmaster has to pry open. At this point in the poem, the I-speaker is beginning her journey back to life, the 'night journey' (Bodkin 1934, p. 70); as in other poems, there is play on 'eye': is the eye the window on the soul, the 'I'? We should note the continuing power of the male, the eye will be opened by the 'jewelmaster'. The I-speaker sees herself as a stone: 'I became a still pebble': this is the reduction to the 'essential core',[4] the I-speaker is pared down to the basic essence of being, the organic nadir from which will come growth.

Plath's use of 'head-stone' is not consistent: it is not always hyphenated, but if one takes the head as the place of consciousness (Hall 1980. p. 136), then 'head-stone' can be taken to mean the stone as representing the head, the place of consciousness, whereas 'headstone' is the more usual memorial tablet. That the head-stone is 'jostled by nothing' suggests a state of suspended animation. Despite the positive final line 'I shall be good as new', the first line of the final stanza is ambiguous, ten 'fingers shape a bowl for shadows.' There is a repeat of the spatial metaphor which occurs throughout the poem, 'stomach', 'cupboard', 'quarry', but the key word is 'shadows': without a shadow, there is no corporeal presence. Are the shadows of this line the shadows formed by the fingers? Are they to indicate that the I-speaker has a bodily presence? Or are they a portent, a hint that even in this new form there are echoes of the past?

In conclusion, there are a number of significant poems in connection with stone imagery written during the years of *The Colossus*. In 'Hardcastle Crags', stone is the all-pervading force of the poem: it is contrasted with the fragility of the human and at this particular point, is external to the speaker, it is the substance on which she can be broken. In 'Child's Park Stones' there is a similar juxtaposing of living and non-living, the stone is contrasted with the colour and life of the azaleas, but the stones in this poem are beginning to take on other qualities. These stones possess in their heart 'the light's tint

and intensity', yet they lack feeling and 'take the whole summer to lose/Their dream of the winter's cold' just as they only warm up as the frost forms. This quality of almost constant temperature, perhaps by extension, constant temperament, appears to the speaker to be desirable. The stones are not subject to human necessities of life, no 'thirst disturbs a stone's bed.' In 'The Colossus', a poem which Plath 'regarded, at the time, as a breakthrough'[5], the qualities possessed by stone have been expanded still further and indeed, the stone is now personified as the male, as giant and all-powerful: but broken If this poem can be considered as an analogy for the landscape of the mind then the I-speaker is integrating the *animus*, she is no longer afraid of the power of the male figure and she appreciates that this can be viewed as a loss, which saddens her. Does the fractured statue represent the fractured self? Perhaps Plath was unconsciously reconstructing herself:

> Reconstituting our collective selves--or putting the broken pieces of our fragmented individualism back together--requires an act of remembrance, discovering and embracing. (Hall 1980, p. 92)

Plath was also engaging, possibly unconsciously, in revisionist mythmaking:

> Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (Ostriker 1986, p. 212)

Does Plath see the male as no longer the totally dominant figure in Western culture that he was in Greek civilization?

Part of the significance of 'The Stones' lies in that the link is made between the image of the stone and the theme of rebirth. The I-speaker comments: 'I became a still pebble', the stony state from which she will be reborn: 'I shall be good as new.' We can see that by the end of 1959 Plath was developing the stone image into a representation of the essential core of the self; the image, significant for her initially at the birth of her brother has now been internalised.

The *Ariel* Years

In the April of 1960, Plath's daughter Frieda was born and she wrote very little during the whole of this year; of the months prior to the birth, Stevenson comments:

> It was a time of disturbing transition: leaving Wellesley, journeying by boat across the Atlantic, traveling up and down to Heptonstall, flat-hunting from the Huwses' menage in Rugby Street, and finally, preparing for their move, with all the arrangements still remaining to be made for the baby's birth. (Stevenson 1989, pp. 181-182)

Only two of the poems, 'You're' and 'Magi' were included in Plath's own ordering of *Ariel*. 1961 was a more fertile year in that five poems were included: 'Morning Song', 'Barren Woman', 'Tulips', 'The Rival' and 'The Moon and the Yew Tree', but it was not until the middle of 1962 that Plath began to include almost all her work in *Ariel*. In her own ordering of that collection

(see Appendix 3), 'Death & Co.', written in November 1962, was the last poem which she included. After 'Poem for a Birthday' there followed a fairly long incubation period:

> in fact, that birth, which had seemed so complete in "The Stones," was dragging on. And it went on dragging on. We can follow the problematic accouchement in the poems. They swing from the apprehensions of a woman or women of sterility and death at one extreme, to joyful maternal celebration of the living and almost-born fetus at the other.[6]

What Hughes considered to be 'the birth of her new creative self',[7] the birth of the new Plath poetic voice was rather the recognition of that voice; if we stay within the pregnancy metaphor, we can perhaps describe it as the conception of the voice--and perhaps in Jungian terms, of the whole personality. It is also significant that again, it is at the very end of the year, around her own birthday that Plath makes a further adjustment, 'at each move we made, she seemed to shed a style' (*Poems*, p. 16). It was in the October of 1962 that Plath finally separated from her husband. The years that followed 'Poem for a Birthday' are the years of gestation, culminating in the sequence of bee poems with which Plath closed *Ariel*, thus ending the volume with the word 'spring'. I have already discussed the effect of the alteration of Plath's own order in my introductory chapter.

I suggested in the previous section that in some poems rocks can be interpreted as the barriers to a greater understanding of self. The I-speaker in 'Two Campers in Cloud Country' (*Poems*, p. 144) is in a desolate landscape:

It is comfortable, for a change, to mean so little.
These rocks offer no purchase to herbage or people.

The rocks offer no solace to the I-speaker, and as in the earlier poem, 'Hardcastle Crags', the speaker feels the sense of threat engendered by this type of landscape: it is enough 'to snuff the quick/Of her small heat out'. In the later poem, it seems she fears this may have happened, she has lost her sense of identity: 'I lean to you, numb as a fossil. Tell me I'm here.' The stone, in this instance the fossil, is seen as non-feeling, yet the I-speaker seeks to find her identity from the stone. If we consider such an image as an analogy for the self, then the I-speaker is looking within herself to find that self. Since the fossil contains within it life from the past, the I-speaker is implying that it is from her past that understanding will develop. Throughout this poem, Plath contrasts the fragility of the human with the harshness of the scenery 'where trees and clouds and animals pay no notice'. She is perhaps implying that the townscape offers the I-speaker her identity; the city 'is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children' (Jung 5, p. 208). The I-speaker's desire is to return to the womb, to be reborn. In the wild country of Rock Lake, Canada, away from the influence of woman and man where the 'pines blot our voices up in their lightest sighs' she has no sense of her own self. The landscape has extinguished her identity, the mindscape is too full of barriers for the I-speaker to discover herself.

In 'Leaving Early' (*Poems*, p. 145) the protagonists 'slept like stones'. I have already quoted Hall in connection with sleep preceding rebirth; in this poem it is rather the non-feeling quality which stones possess in Plath's world to which she refers: to sleep is to be stone-like. In 'Love Letter' (*Poems*, p. 147) the sleep image recurs, the I-speaker slept as 'a snake/Masked among black rocks as a black rock/In the white hiatus of winter', a reference to Plath's own 'winter solstice' (*Journals*, p. 69)from which comes spring and change:

> Not easy to state the change you made.
> If I'm alive now, then I was dead,
> Though, like a stone, unbothered by it.

Again, this is the non-feeling state. The I-speaker perceives herself as all stone with a 'cheek of basalt' and recognises that she is not alone for many 'stones lay/Dense and expressionless round about', which recalls the lines from 'The Stones' where the people of the city hunted 'the stones, taciturn and separate'. Does the I-speaker see humanity as generally uncaring, or in a state of non-feeling, non-perception of themselves? Is this how she perceives herself? It appears that the I-speaker has regressed from the rebirth depicted at the end 'The Stones' to a state of suspended animation, the 'winter solstice'.

This poem, as is 'The Stones', is of significance in linking the rebirth theme with the stone imagery, in which the I-speaker charts her own progress from non-perceptive to perceptive state. In contrast with the I-speaker's sleeping or stone-like state, when awake she can pour herself 'out like a fluid'. The

landscape is like the sleeping I-speaker, it is lifeless, tree 'and stone glittered, without shadows' but the I-speaker develops:

> My finger-length grew lucent as glass.
> I started to bud like a March twig:
> An arm and a leg, an arm, a leg.
> From stone to cloud, so I ascended.
> Now I resemble a sort of god
> Floating through the air in my soul-shift
> Pure as a pane of ice. It's a gift.

The end-stopped lines suggest the fragmented nature of the developing personality, and the first line recalls Plath's comment:

> My poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. (*Dreams*, p. 92)

The I-speaker perceives herself in a child-like state.

While there may be some doubt in connection with the dating of the early work, Hughes notes that 'after 1956 she kept a full record of the dates on which she sent her poems off to magazines, and she usually did this as soon as possible after writing them'. (*Poems*, p. 17) 'Leaving Early' and 'Poem for a Birthday' were both written near to Plath's own birth date of 27 October, a time which she found significant. 'Hardcastle Crags' was obviously experienced earlier than October since at this time Plath was teaching at Smith College; she notes in her *Journals* that 'Child's Park Stones' was written in June of 1958 (*Journals*, p. 235). It would seem that her actual birthday becomes of greater significance as the years progress and is possibly a process of reviewing each year, of looking back to the significant time at

Yaddo when she wrote with such fluency and when she was pregnant for the first time, a time when 'something becomes real that did not exist before--or that existed only as a word, a theory'. (Homans 1986, p. 26)

In 'Parliament Hill Fields' (*Poems*, p. 152) the I-speaker has reverted to the non-perceptive state of earlier poems, 'I'm a stone'. The birth process of the new personality is long and difficult and appears to involve the speaker of the poems returning repeatedly to the starting point for that birth, the stone, or in Jungian terms, the self, 'the stone which was also myself'. (Jung 1963, p. 39) As in other poems, the psychic landscape of the speaker is explored. Plath commented on this poem that the speaker is 'overwhelmed by an emotion so powerful as to colour and distort the scenery' and is caught 'between the grief caused by the loss of a child and the joy aroused by the knowledge of an older child safe at home.' (*The Living Poet*) At the opening of the poem the I-speaker contemplates blankness, 'this bald hill': for Plath a white, blank world is the 'symbol of shutting off from normal clear vision' (*Journals*, p. 149); the I-speaker moves from sadness to hope, from a blank, colourless world to a coloured world, the lit house with the 'orange pompons, the 'rabbit-eared/Blue shrub'; she moves from the non-feeling state of the stone to entering the feeling state associated with the living child.

'Tulips' (*Poems*, p. 160) was the first poem which Plath wrote

> without her usual studies over the Thesaurus, and at top speed, as one might write an urgent letter. From then on,

> all her poems were written in this way'. (Hughes 1966, p. 86)

It would appear from Hughes' comment that Plath was, at this point, rediscovering the fluency of writing which she first found at Yaddo where she wrote 'Poem for a Birthday'. 'Tulips' is set in a hospital, an immediate link with 'The Stones', and the 'city where men are mended'. As in the earlier poem where the I-speaker was 'a still pebble', so in this later poem to the nurses, the anaesthetist and surgeons the I-speaker's body is a pebble: 'they tend it as water/Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.' As in 'Parliament Hill Fields' the I-speaker has regressed, has gone back to the stasis which she perceives as representing safety and happiness. She is aware she has to emerge from this state despite the fact that she 'only wanted/To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.' But the vivid tulips bring her to life, they fill up the air 'like a loud noise' and they concentrate her 'attention, that was happy/Playing and resting without committing itself.' Her body is no longer a pebble, but responds to the flowers and hears the sounds created as the air 'snags and eddies round them': this sensual awareness parallels 'The Stones' where sight, hearing, touch and taste are awakened.

Plath continued to develop the stone imagery. 'The Rival' (*Poems*, p. 166) is, according to Hughes, 'a poem left from a series specifically about that woman in the moon, the disquieting muse' (Hughes 1966, p. 87), while Wagner-Martin suggests it concerns Plath's feelings about her mother. (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 189)

If the moon smiled, she would resemble you.
You leave the same impression
Of something beautiful, but annihilating.
Both of you are great light borrowers.
Her O-mouth grieves at the world; yours is unaffected.

And your first gift is making stone out of everything.
I wake to a mausoleum; you are here,
Ticking your fingers on the marble table, looking for
cigarettes . . .

The rival and the moon are likened to each other, both are thieves of sight but whereas the moon's 'O-mouth grieves', the rival's is indifferent, and it is the rival's reductive powers on which the I-speaker comments. 'I wake to a mausoleum' suggests the rival has caused the death of some part of the I-speaker, perhaps by borrowing the light; the darkness that follows is indicative of an inner darkness to be entered.

'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (*Poems*, p. 170) continues the hospital imagery of 'Tulips' and echoes the enclosing imagery of 'The Rival'. This poem is one of the few where one can presume that the I-speaker is not female. It is noticeable that the speaker is concerned not with the soul which is 'another light./I have not seen it', but with the body 'which is in my hands', a faceless body, yet a living body for it still has a soul although this 'has receded like a ship's light'. This poem also has echoes of 'Poem for a Birthday' and its flowers and vegetables; in this later poem it 'is a garden I have to do with--tubers and fruits/Oozing their jammy substances'; the body as a place for growth. Yet the covering for this 'garden' is inanimate, 'pale marble' with 'intricate, blue piping', the veining in marble is perceived as the veins under the surface of the skin. This body

is 'a Roman thing' recalling 'The Colossus'; the 'stone pill of repose' links with the phrase 'we slept like stones' in 'Leaving Early'. The male surgeon has worked on the body:

> It is a statue the orderlies are wheeling off.
> I have perfected it.

Here we have the all-powerful male, the colossus before it was fragmented; this male authority figure is concerned only with the body, not the soul, and only with parts of the body, a 'set of teeth, or stones . . . /And tissue in slices--a pathological salami': again the image of fragmentation. Plath is perhaps suggesting that this is the manner in which she perceives herself at this point, not as a whole person, but as a collection of disparate parts. She also noted this shattered aspect in a wider sense: 'Of course life is fragmentary'. (*Journals*, p. 305)

The image of 'dry-papped stones' which occurred in 'Point Shirley' is used again in 'The Detective' (*Poems*, p. 208) as 'two white stones', but whereas in the earlier poem the I-speaker was seeking to find love, a love generated by the grandmother and absorbed into the stones of the building, in the later poem it is the two children who search for love from the milk which 'came yellow, then blue and sweet as water.' Yet this cannot sustain the two babes since 'their bones showed'. Is this perhaps an analogy for poetic inspiration, since the speaker feels a total loss of imagination, a death which Plath feared?

> What I fear most, I think, is the death of the imagination. When the sky outside is merely pink, and the rooftops merely black: that photographic mind which paradoxically tells the truth, but the worthless truth, about the world. (*Dreams*, p. 217)

For Plath merely to describe a scene, an experience, is 'the worthless truth'; she has to search for the meaning behind the event and in her choice of images and words, she is offering us, her readers, the opportunity to explore that hidden meaning.

> Proper critical attention should be redirected to the difficult, small constructiveness of her words, the everyday labor that continues despite the life-punctuating spectacles. (Broe 1980, p. 179)

During this period, Plath included marble in her images of stone, a stone that has been formed or worked in some way. We therefore need to take into consideration the connotations that marble may have had for Plath: its association with statuary, particularly classical statuary and hence possibly classical mythology; its association through monuments with graves and hence death; its quality of coldness; the veining which can resemble that of blood vessels and hence human skin; its smoothness; its brittle nature, yet paradoxically, its enduring quality; and that in order to release its full beauty, it has to be worked. While we need to be aware of these associations, we also need to remember that the poetic symbol may be an object of contemplation in itself (Hough 1960, p. 127): a stone may simply be a round, hard object. However, this does not appear appropriate in Plath's use of the image. For one critic, Plath's stone and related images of marble statues are part of a death imagery (Mollinger 1981, pp. 97-8); for another, the poet

> sees the world either as an inert, unresponsive hardness, symbolized by stone, or as a dangerous otherness, symbolized by devouring others. (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 150)

We could posit that this is not far removed from an earlier suggestion, stone as the opposite of the human; however, this suggestion does not take into account the possibilities which may exist within the stone, and of which the mason is aware. We should remember that Plath and her husband were friends of Leonard Baskin, the sculptor, and that Plath would no doubt be aware of the hidden qualities of any medium which can be formed into something other with the use of hands or tools.

Throughout her work, Plath associates marble with statuary as in 'Lorelei' (*Poems*, p. 94) in which the sisters have 'hair heavier/Than sculpted marble'; as in 'Barren Woman' (*Poems*, p 157) where marble 'lilies/Exhale their pallor like scent'; as in 'Finisterre' (*Poems*, p. 169):

> Our Lady of the Shipwrecked is striding toward the horizon,
> Her marble skirts blown back in two pink wings.
> A marble sailor kneels at her foot distractedly . . .

However, in 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' the marble and its veining comes to represent human skin with its pattern of blood vessels, 'the intricate, blue piping under this pale marble', an image repeated in 'Berck-Plage' (*Poems*, p. 199), marble 'facades with blue veins'. In 'The Other' (*Poems*, p. 201) the 'stolen horses, the fornications/Circle a womb of marble', an image of sterility. As with the stone image, there are a number of different interpretations.

In conclusion, we should note that during the *Ariel* years Plath returns repeatedly to the image of the stone as the organic nadir. The poems of these years which chart her personal

development through the development of her poetic voice are complex. Plath is seeking to make the unknown known, to come to terms with herself, to discover her self. The stone is apparently the one sure centre in a shifting world and the I-speaker in the poems needs to reassure herself of its continued existence. Rocks in the physical landscape can be interpreted to be barriers to self-understanding in the psychic landscape; it is during these years that Plath develops the image of marble which, like the stone, carries many connotations; we, her readers, have a freedom to interpret and find our own relevance within such an image.

The Final Months

Critics have been aware of the force and dynamism of the poems which Plath wrote in the final few weeks of her life;[6] the danger has always been that they are viewed as significant because the poet subsequently took her own life. It does seem unlikely that Plath was contemplating suicide from the November of 1962 until the February of 1963, but, as I have already discussed in my introductory chapter, her journals for this period were destroyed by Hughes and we are therefore reliant upon the letters and the poems as evidence of her self-recorded mental states. Hughes notes:

> Two more notebooks survived for a while, maroon-backed ledgers like the '57-'59 volume, and continued the record from late '59 to within three days of her death. The last of these contained entries for several months, and I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to

> read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival). The other disappeared. (*Journals*, p. xv)

No doubt he regarded his reasons as valid; for those of us studying Plath, a unique source has gone.

We should consider the letters for this period with caution since certain of them 'are no doubt exactly what Plath felt her mother wanted to hear from her "well-adjusted" daughter' (Bundtzen 1983, p. 64), whereas in the *Journals* we may have a more accurate picture of the poet's own perceptions, although Plath may have written these, to some extent, for an audience. She refers to Woolf's *A Writer's Diary* in both the *Letters* (p. 305) and the *Journals* (p. 152), and may have been aware of the possibility of her own journals being published in later years. The last letter to which we have access in the published volume is dated 16 January 1963, and this, like so many others, has been edited. There is one significant phrase in connection with Plath's search for her self: 'I just haven't felt to have any *identity* under the steamroller of decisions and responsibilities of this last half year' (*Letters*, p. 495). If, as I have suggested, Plath regards the stone as the basic essence of the self, then the lack of references to it in the late poems can be explained by the above quotation: at this time she had little perception of her self, she was unaware of her own source of selfhood.

In 'Paralytic' (*Poems*, p. 266) a number of favoured Plath images are repeated. The hospital setting, which was used in connection with the theme of rebirth in 'The Stones' is implicit in 'the

iron lung' and the 'starched, inaccessible breast'. 'It happens. Will it go on?--' The I-speaker questions this state of paralysis, and makes it clear that it is paralysis of mind and body: 'My mind a rock,/No fingers to grip, no tongue'. Whereas in earlier poems, the I-speaker has referred to herself as a stone, here there is a change, her mind is 'a rock'. Rocks have often been part of the physical landscape in Plath's poems, perhaps an influence of *The Tempest* in which they, together with the wind and the sea were the enemies (Introduction to *The Tempest*, p. 7). In the poems, they become part of the psychic landscape, representing perhaps mental problems, emotional problems, or barriers to an understanding of the self, but in this particular poem the mind itself does not contain the problem, it is the problem, it is 'dead' to all thought processes. In 'Tulips' the I-speaker was a stone; now she perceives herself as a dead egg; yet this could be the stone, if we take the Chinese concept of the stone as pregnant seed (Hall 1980, p. 36). The 'dead' perhaps refers to the body which is paralysed, rather than the soul. This 'dead' body is aware of the senses, yet cannot receive the sensations:

> The still waters
> Wrap my lips,
>
> Eyes, nose and ears,
> A clear
> Cellophane I cannot crack.

As is the surgeon in 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.', it would appear that the I-speaker is male, for he recalls a photograph of his wife; he lives in a world of women, nurses, wife, daughters.

Whereas the surgeon demonstrated the power of the male authority figure, in this poem, the male is helpless, paralysed. Is Plath suggesting a general waning of male power, or that she is no longer under male dominance? The I-speaker is dead to all physical sensations and dead to human aspirations. For Plath, a sensual awareness is evidence of rebirth, as I noted earlier in connection with 'The Stones'.

> On my bare back
>
> I smile, a buddha, all
> Wants, desire
> Falling from me like rings
> Hugging their lights.
>
> The claw
> Of the magnolia,
> Drunk on its own scents,
> Asks nothing of life.

As a buddha, the I-speaker is a teacher and a philosopher, and she perceives herself as being beyond wants and desires, those mental states necessary to humankind. Can we then posit that this state of bodily paralysis and mental--or imaginative--death is how the I-speaker views herself? Perhaps the I-speaker is both female and male--in Jungian terms the shadow and the *animus* have been integrated--and is fearful of the world to which she will be reborn. The buddha is smiling: being beyond human needs is pleasurable. We should note the threat contained in 'claw' which suggests a grasping movement and is in contradiction to the final line: 'Asks nothing of life.' The I-speaker appears to be perceiving herself as a plant and, like the magnolia, she too, asks nothing of life.

I noted earlier that Plath felt she had lost her sense of identity during the final months of her life. 'Paralytic' is an expression of this sense of loss, the I-speaker views herself as paralysed, dead to all physical sensation, her mind dead to all thought. It is undoubtedly significant that the I-speaker should appear to be male: this is a distancing device which enables Plath to explore the sensations of paralysis while perhaps denying that they are her sensations.

Conclusion

In the Introduction I listed Jung's definitions of the stone, derived from his studies of alchemy. Does Plath make use of any of these definitions? There is a similarity between the definition of the soul given by both Plato and Jung, respectively: 'that part of his personal life with which a man identifies himself' (Crombie 1964, p. 78) and 'the *living* in man' (Jung 1940, p. 75). One of Plath's images is of the stone as the essence of self, the 'quartz grit'; for her it is the organic nadir from which development proceeds. Plato conceived of the soul as separable from the body, a concept adopted by Plath; perhaps the Jungian definition of the stone best suited to Plath is as either 'the human soul', or 'man himself'.

At an early age, Plath perceived the stone as external to herself, she saw it as 'other', but as her writing developed, the image was internalised, 'I'm a stone', a phrase similar to that

used by Jung of himself. The stone is also used descriptively, as in 'Hardcastle Crags', where it is the governing image for an entire landscape and all contained therein. Rock is a variation of the image. As in an external landscape it can represent a barrier, thus in a psychic landscape it can represent a mental barrier to self-awareness. The image of marble was one which Plath developed largely during the *Ariel* years: like stone, it had a number of different associations, from statuary, to skin, to sterility.

There is no single stone image; there is no single Plath voice. We should not expect that a poet of her standing would confine herself to one interpretation, to one myth, and while many of her poems can be read as explorations of the voyage into herself, they are not all so, and it is in this variety that part of her enduring interest for critics lies.

FOUR

IMAGES OF WATER

Introduction

I noted in the previous chapter that Plath does not confine herself to a single interpretation of the image of the stone, and that throughout her work she develops the image. In this chapter, I propose to examine the image of water and the manner in which Plath develops this image. Langbaum has suggested that 'Arnold is the first Victorian poet to deal with the modern problem of loss of self', and he also notes a recurring theme in Arnold's work, that 'our identity lies in an unconscious life symbolized by water' (Langbaum 1977, pp. 52 & 63). From 'The Forsaken Merman' and *The Tempest*, Plath would have become aware of the image of the sea as the medium through which rebirth occurs. As with the stone imagery, and as would be expected of water, a changeable and fluid element, Plath appears to attribute different meanings to it. 'The sea is the favourite symbol for the unconscious' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 177). Is it as the medium of rebirth that the image is most significant, or as a representation of the unconscious, or can we consider the two images in effect as one, that to be reborn, an individual must dive deep into her/his unconscious?

As I have already noted in earlier chapters, we know that Plath read Jung's *The Development of Personality* (Volume 17 of the Collected Works), and that she was reading it in October 1959. She notes that she:

> read in Jung case history confirmations of certain images in my story. The child who dreamt of a loving, beautiful mother as a witch or animal: the mother going mad in later life, grunting like pigs, barking like dogs, growling like bears, in a fit of lycanthropy. (*Journals*, p. 317)

This refers to Jung's passage:

> They dreamt of her as a witch or a dangerous animal, and they could not understand it at all, since their mother was so lovely and so utterly devoted to them. Years later the mother became insane, and in her insanity would exhibit a sort of lycanthropy in which she crawled about on all fours and imitated the grunting of pigs, the barking of dogs, and the growling of bears. (Jung 17, p. 55)

Since the Plath notes on Jung contain references to later passages in this volume, it would seem feasible to assume that she was aware of other sections in it, possibly the following:

> By virtue of its indefinite extension the unconscious might be compared to the sea, while consciousness is like an island rising out of its midst. (Jung *ibid.* p. 51)

From 1959 onwards, we are probably justified in interpreting the image of the sea in Plath's work as a representation of the unconscious.

> The unconscious is the ever-creative mother of consciousness. (Jung *ibid.* p. 115)

Plath may also have read this passage which gives insight into her use of phrases in which the sea is 'a deep woman', and is 'the motherly pulse' (*Dreams*, p. 117).

'In dreams and fantasies the sea or a large expanse of water signifies the unconscious.' (Jung 5, p. 219) Plath described a dream:

> In this dream there's a great half-transparent lake stretching away in every direction, too big for me to see the shores of it, if there are any shores, and I'm hanging over it, looking down from the glass belly of some helicopter. At the bottom of the lake--so deep I can only guess at the dark masses moving and heaving--are the real

> dragons . . . It's into this lake people's minds run at night, brooks and gutter-trickles to one borderless common reservoir. It bears no resemblance to those pure sparkling-blue sources of drinking water the suburbs guard more jealously than the Hope diamond in the middle of pine woods and barbed fences.
>
> It's the sewage farm of the ages . . . (*Dreams*, p. 19)

Plath is suggesting the bottom of the lake as repository for all the negative aspects of humanity. In a radio broadcast she said her poems were 'about the things of this world' but that they also included feelings such as fear, despair and barrenness which often wore the masks of quite unworldly things such as 'ghosts, or trolls, or antique gods' (*The Living Poet*). The 'dragons' in the above quotation symbolise those powerful emotions which we fear and therefore hide.

In Chapter Three, I hypothesised that, in certain of Plath's poems, the rock of the physical landscape represents the mental problem of the psychic landscape, a barrier to self-awareness:

> The scraggy rock spit shielding the town's blue bay
> Against which the brunt of outer sea
> Beats . . .
>
> 'Departure' (*Poems*, p. 51)

The sea is perceived as violent, almost as the enemy of the 'blue bay' which is itself a part of the sea. This double image suggests the conscious awareness, the quietness of the 'blue bay', protected from the troublesome unconscious, 'the brunt of outer sea' by the rock, the psychic barrier to self-understanding. Water 'is the commonest symbol for the

unconscious' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 18). It also indicates Plath's ambivalent attitude to the sea as both threat and haven.

Plath spent her formative early years living close to the sea, it was the background to the years when her father was alive, years which she would later view as a form of perfection: 'beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth.' (*Dreams*, p. 124) It seems she recognises the dream-like quality of this past life which cannot be recaptured. Plath's ambivalent attitude to the sea is given expression in 'Ocean 1212-W': if 'it could court, it could also kill' (*Dreams*, p. 117), and this ambivalence appears repeatedly in her work, the sea as haven or threat. In 'Among the Bumblebees' (*Dreams*, pp. 259-266), Alice, in an 'ecstasy of terror' rides on her father's back in the sea; the little girl is aware of the power of the sea, its threat which engenders the 'terror', yet she is with her father in whom she puts her trust, the 'ecstasy'. She imagines her father will keep her safe from that threat. Aurelia Plath notes that this story is an example of Plath's 'fusion of father and grandfather': the swimming episode attributed to her father was with her grandfather. (*Letters*, p. 22) Plath's final memory of the sea of her childhood is of the violence of the hurricane: she likens the sea to 'a broody animal, evil violets in its eye' (*Dreams*, p. 123). She personifies it as a sinister creature, one involved in the process of creation.

> And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland.' (*Dreams*, p. 124)

The sea becomes inextricably bound up with violence, with death--'stiffens' suggests a corpse--and with the pain of loss: of her father, of her childhood, of a particular landscape. Paradoxically, she perceives her father, her childhood and the seascape as part of 'a fine, white flying myth', perfection. This is perhaps further reinforcement of Plath's vision of the sea as threat and haven. Lucie-Smith has pointed out Plath's ambivalent attitude to the sea: 'the sea is simultaneously menacing yet peaceful'.[1] This ambivalence is supported in her prose: 'the angry gray ocean' (*Letters*, p. 74) and 'the great honest blue sea' (*Dreams*, p. 276), the two colours being combined in a verbal description of the sea at Whitby as a 'windy grey blue wash in the rain' (*Americans who live in Britain*). In her novel, Plath uses the sea metaphor to describe Esther's moment of consciousness at the point of her attempted suicide:

> The silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. Then, at the rim of vision, it gathered itself, and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep. (*Bell*, p. 179)

At this point, passage into the sea represents not death but sleep; the moment of contact with the sea is an ending. Later Plath perceives this contact as a beginning.

Plath extends her own awareness of the significance of the sea to certain of her characters:

> she wondered if she could ever explain to anyone how she felt about the sea. It was part of her, and she wanted to reach out, out, until she encompassed the horizon within the circle of her arms. (*Dreams*, p. 255)

The important phrase here is 'it was part of her'; clearly Plath was in touch with the concept that the sea 'is the favourite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives' (Jung 9, Part 1, pp. 177-178). If we view the sea as the mother of life--'water, and particularly deep water, usually has a maternal significance, roughly corresponding to "womb"' (Jung 5, p. 267)--then the desire to return to the sea implies a desire to return to that mother and hence to be reborn.

In her prose work, Plath often uses the image of diving, she is 'plunged so deep in [her] own very private little whirlpool of negativism' (*Journals*, p. 84); it is 'as if I had to plunge to the bottom of nonexistence, of absolute fear, before I can rise again' (*Journals*, p. 250). She notes:

> I could hold my nose, close my eyes, and jump blindly into the waters of some man's insides, submerging myself . . . One fine day I would float to the surface, quite drowned, and supremely happy with my newfound selfless self. (*Journals*, p. 36)

At this stage in her life (1951) Plath perceives that the search for her self involves becoming absorbed by the male, an absorption she feared. Marriage 'might make me "lose myself in him," as I said before, and thereby lose the need to write . . .' (*Journals*, p. 37) Hall points out that the 'going down and coming up are essential parts of the search for self' (Hall 1980, p 206). It would seem that we can perhaps view Plath's search, her plunge into her own inner being, as conforming to the Jungian model of the search for self.

For Plath water was also the medium of cleansing, of purification, processes associated with rebirth: 'I had been washed by the sea, cleansed, baptised, purified' (*Journals*, p. 28). She believed that by passing into and through water, she would emerge different: 'I often wonder what would have happened if I had managed to pierce that looking-glass' (*Dreams*, p. 117); this referred to her attempt to crawl into the sea as a baby, an incident she discusses in the 1962 broadcast, 'Ocean 1212-W' (*Dreams*, pp. 117-124), and in which she viewed the event as an attempt to plunge through the surface, to penetrate the hidden depths. She gave a psychic significance to a physical experience.

In summary, I suggest that Plath offers a number of different interpretations of the image of water: it is perceived as both threat and haven, and is associated with a ritual cleansing and purification; it is a representation of the unconscious, and is the medium of rebirth. In the following sections I trace the use of this image through her *oeuvre*.

Juvenilia

The quotation in the previous section, 'I often wonder what would have happened if I had managed to pierce that looking-glass' (*Dreams*, p. 117) refers to a childhood incident and was written with the benefit of hindsight. I noted earlier that Plath uses

the image of diving in her prose writing; it also occurs in her early poetry:

> Like a diver on a lofty spar of land
> Atop the flight of stairs I stand.
> A whirlpool leers at me,
> Absorbent as a sponge;
> I cast off my identity
> And make the fatal plunge.
>
> 'Family Reunion' (*Poems*, p. 300)

This is the I-speaker's response to the gathering of relations: Aunt Elizabeth who is fat always, 'and out of breath', Uncle Paul with his 'jarring baritone', Cousin Jane with 'hands like nervous butterflies', and the nephew who has 'a fretful whine'. As in many of Plath's poems, there is a degree of ambiguity: is the I-speaker diving into this gathering which will absorb her as a sponge absorbs water, or is she diving into herself? This reunion has confronted her with a number of possible alternatives in terms of character development, none of which she finds congenial; she does not wish to become like these relatives and must accordingly search for her own identity. 'I cast off my identity': she denies her present self, she must 'make the fatal plunge', 'fatal' in the sense of destiny. Perhaps we could also consider this family gathering, the relations and their habits as metaphors for aspects of character within an individual, as *personae*. Jung's definition of the *persona* is 'the individual's system of adaptation to, or the manner he assumes in dealing with, the world.' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 122) Plath questions: 'Why can't I try on different lives, like dresses, to see which fits best and is most becoming?' (*Journals*, p. 38). Yet from

the I-speaker's description of these 'lives', she is not happy with such *personae*. An alternative interpretation of this poem is that the I-speaker is looking into her own unconscious into which she must 'dive' to find herself. She has to cast off her present identity, in a sense perhaps, to die, to make the fatal plunge in order to find a new or different self. The family members represent all the gathered dark masses which the I-speaker believes exist in the recesses of her being. As I noted earlier, at this moment in Plath's writing career, there is no exploration of the unconscious, the momentum of the I-speaker is simply into that unconscious; contact with water is perceived as an ending, there is no exploration of a new beginning.

The metaphor of diving is repeated less ambiguously in 'Moonsong at Morning' (*Poems*, p. 316) in the final lines: 'dive at your mirror/and drown within.' In this poem the speaker is aware of the mockery of the moon, the 'moon of illusion' whose fantasy is dispelled by the light of day: 'cocks crow up a rival/to mock your face'. Yet daylight is not perceived as a source of pleasure:

> In gardens of squalor
> the sleepers wake
> as their golden jailer
> turns the rack;

Whereas it seemed that daybreak, because it removed all moonlit illusions, was to be welcomed:

> the light of logic
> will show us that
> all moonstruck magic
> is dissolute;

yet this is not so since

facts have blasted
the angel's frame
and stern truth twisted
the radiant limb.

Daylight has become the source of fear:

Reflect in terror
the scorching sun . . .

As an escape from this fear, the speaker has to turn inward, to dive into herself and 'drown within', lose herself in her own unconscious: she is casting off her present identity in order to find her new self.

These two early poems both point to the direction of Plath's later poetry. In the Juvenilia the poet is exploring possibilities; many of the images do not possess the clarity they achieve in the later work, but the emphasis is on the need to look within the self for answers. Before 1956, the diving into oneself provides the end; in the later work, Plath expands this so that the drowning within leads to a rebirth. In the early poems the speaker is aware only of this need to search inside; water is the unknown, it is a metaphor for 'the artist's subconscious' (*Journals*, p. 222).

The Colossus Years

The years of this phase were crucial to Plath's development as a poet and as an individual, for it was during this period that she took her degree at Cambridge, met and married Ted Hughes, returned to Smith College to teach and subsequently abandoned

this career in order to concentrate on writing. 1959 closed with the stay at Yaddo and discovery of her pregnancy. The poems of *The Colossus* have been noted as being overcorrect in some respects:

> The earlier poems have some strength and passion, but also a saving, self-protective primness.[2]
>
> Elaborations of the labor of poetry tend to be the rule before 1959 . . .[3]
>
> Her obsession with intricate rhyming and metrical schemes . (Hughes 1965)
>
> It is poetry of chosen words, of careful schemes and accumulated effects; its voice is unsteady, made-up.[4]

Storr offers an interpretation on the use of form, it 'is the part of creativity most firmly associated with consciousness, judgment, control and other ego attributes.' (Storr 1972, p. 224) We can understand that by employing various verse forms Plath is allowing her ego to dominate; she is not yet in touch with her unconscious.

Of the poem 'Tale of a Tub' (*Poems*, p. 24), Plath noted that it was more abstract than 'Winter Landscape, with Rooks', which she described as 'a psychic landscape' (*Poems*, p. 275); clearly, she was recognising her ability to use her poetry to explore her inner experiences. Plath uses the plural personal pronoun 'we' in the poem, suggesting that she was perceiving the self as more than a single entity, perhaps Wehr's 'multiple personalities' which I discussed in the introductory chapter. For the speaker in this poem, 'we' includes 'the stranger in the lavatory mirror'; she finds it difficult to recognise herself, yet knows that this self is part of the same body. She asks:

. . . can our dreams
ever blur the intransigent lines which draw
the shape that shuts us in?

She perceives the body as confining, perhaps as a limitation. As a child, the speaker 'saw' beyond the material object:

Twenty years ago, the familiar tub
bred an ample batch of omens; but now
water faucets spawn no danger . . .

Now she asks:

Just how guilty are we when the ceiling
reveals no cracks that can be decoded? when washbowl
maintains it has no more holy calling
than physical ablution, and the towel
dryly disclaims that fierce troll faces lurk
in its explicit folds? or when the window,
blind with steam, will not admit the dark
which shrouds our prospects in ambiguous shadow?

She appears to be implying that loss of childhood has also brought loss of imagination. She perceives the lack of ability to observe the material object as anything other than a physical presence as a source of guilt. Can we speculate that the 'fault' lies in the progress from childhood to adulthood, and that the speaker has internalised this as a negative movement?

'We take the plunge' is a repetition of the phrase in 'Family Reunion' quoted in the previous section; in this later poem the water distorts the limbs which 'waver, faintly green, shuddering away/from the genuine color of skin'. The speaker recognises the need for masks:

. . . accuracy must not stalk at large:
each day demands we create our whole world over,
disguising the constant horror in a coat
of many-coloured fictions . . .

The 'real' world is unacceptable, it must be disguised in half-truths. In the final lines of the poem, death is seen as the necessary precursor to rebirth, and surely there are echoes from *The Tempest*:

> . . . in faith
> we shall board our imagined ship and wildly sail
> among sacred islands of the mad till death
> shatters the fabulous stars and makes us real.

At this point, the speaker recognises the need to 'die' in order to be reborn. She perceives that rebirth as becoming 'real', and we can perhaps understand the references to casting off an identity which I discussed in the previous section: the present identity is perceived as 'unreal'. The significance of water in this poem, which was 'written from the bathtub' (*Poems*, p. 275), is that this fluid element is perceived as the agent of change, it alters that which is within its depths, in a manner that our dreams cannot, and it is in passage on or through water that the possibility of rebirth lies.

It is interesting that the three great 'water' poems of this period, 'Full Fathom Five', 'Lorelei' and 'Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor' have been placed together in the collection: they were presumably composed at approximately the same time. Did a specific event in the poet's life induce such writing? Plath consulted her own oracle at this time:

> . . . Pan said I should write on the poem subject "Lorelei" because they are my "own kin." . . . The subject appealed to me doubly (or triply), the German legend of the Rhine sirens, the sea-childhood symbol, and the death-wish involved in the song's beauty.' (*Journals*, pp. 244-5)

'Lorelei' (*Poems*, p. 94) is the internalisation of experience:

. . . Yet these shapes float

Up toward me, troubling the face
Of quiet. . . .

The I-speaker is looking through the water and hence deep into herself where she finds 'a world more full and clear/Than can be', but she is afraid of what she sees, the images trouble 'the face/Of quiet' and the sisters, the Lorelei, 'lodge/On the pitched reefs of nightmare': they are night visitations, perhaps representatives of that which the dreamer most fears. Yet it is not the song of the sirens that the I-speaker dreads, it is their silence when she is left alone with these frightening images, alone with her own thoughts. 'Worse/Even than your maddening/Song, your silence.' The I-speaker fears her own unconscious. Plath wrote in the *Journals*:

> You fool--you are afraid of being alone with your own mind. (*Journals*, p. 85)

I have already noted the significance of the final lines of this poem in relation to the image of the stone; there is a similar significance in relation to the image of water.

O river, I see drifting

Deep in your flux of silver
Those great goddesses of peace.
Stone, stone, ferry me down there.

This poem is a psychic landscape: the I-speaker is looking deep into herself, into her innermost thoughts, perhaps into areas she has not previously probed, and while earlier in the poem these thoughts and images were disquieting, at this point, water is seen as the unconscious wherein lies peace. The I-speaker has discovered a vital fact: peace, however she may choose to define

it, lies within the self, it cannot be imposed externally. If, as proposed earlier, Plath uses the stone image to indicate the soul, the self, then the I-speaker's desire connects soul and unconscious: it is her soul, her self, she will find if she looks long enough into her own unconscious. This also gives some understanding of the sea as threat and haven: to make conscious that which is hidden is undoubtedly threatening, but paradoxically it is just this process which brings an inner peace.

This juxtaposing of stone and water occurs in the prose:

> The silence surged back, smoothing itself as black water smooths to its old surface calm over a dropped stone. (*Bell*, p. 180)

The passage is part of the description of Esther's suicide attempt, but if we consider stone and water as soul and unconscious respectively, then the unconscious 'covers' the soul, acts as a protection for that innermost essence of the human being. While the I-speaker may seek to uncover her soul, she dreads what she may find:

> . . . there was something strange and alien concealed beneath the smooth sand and the calm, unruffled surface of the water. (*Dreams*, p. 257)

It appears that the I-speaker fears the unknown, she is afraid of herself.

'Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor' (*Poems*, p. 95) is based on an incident in 1957, in conclusion to which Plath notes:

> An image: weird, of another world, with its own queer habits, of mud, lumped, underpeopled with quiet crabs. . . (*Journals*, p. 174)

Plath is looking into new areas: perhaps this other world can be considered as the other world of her unknown or unknowable self. The crabs have become representative of human life: they are creatures which hide from approaching danger, creatures which often live on the margins of land and sea; perhaps this was Plath's perception of herself at this time. Lines such as: 'Mud stench, shell guts, gulls' leavings', and 'Grass put forth claws' create a sense of threat reminiscent of 'Dream with Clam-Diggers'. It is a 'wary otherworld'. Plath's use of battle imagery stresses the conflict between the known world of the shoreline and the otherworld of the crabs:

> The crabs
> Inched from their pigmy burrows
> And from the trench-dug mud, all
> Camouflaged in mottled mail
> Of browns and greens. Each wore one
> Claw swollen to a shield large
> As itself . . .

In this poem the sea is viewed as the background to the conflict of these two worlds, yet it is the nurturer, the life-force for the inhabitants of this other world, it is the symbol of generation, for from water comes life. It is significant that the battle of the two worlds takes place on the seashore, a clearly defined 'borderline', with water as the background to a birth. The sea is a 'thin and sluggish thread', it maintains the link between the known and unknown; ultimately, it is a 'friendly/Element'. Plath is continually aware of this struggle which takes place within herself and which she translates through the various images into her prose and poetry. She writes out the

search for unity, symbolising the quest now as a battle, now a retreat from one world into another. The reader is made aware through the number of different images and events used, of the enormity of the search, of the problems attendant on the search and of the implications for the self which are contained in the search and in the ultimate discovery. It is in these poems which are particularly concerned with water that the poet explores her own inner consciousness, endeavouring to make the unknown available to that consciousness; she appears afraid of what she may find, yet compelled to continue the search. Plath gives form to this in an earlier poem, 'Perseus' (*Poems*, p. 82), it is 'our madness' and 'our sanity': for the I-speaker in so many of the poems the known is the sane, the unknown, the mad.

I have already discussed 'Full Fathom Five' (*Poems*, p. 92) in detail in Chapter Two. In connection with the image of water, part of its significance lies in the power of this element to change the physical appearance, as in 'Tale of a Tub'.

> . . . I
> Cannot look much but your form suffers
> Some strange injury . . .

As the mist clears, so all is revealed: 'so vapors/Ravel to clearness on the dawn sea.' Perhaps this is a fog of non-understanding which will lift at dawn, symbolically the time of rebirth. The final lines illustrate the other significant aspect of this poem in connection with the theme of water: 'this thick air is murderous./I would breathe water.' The I-speaker perceives the 'atmosphere' as 'killing' her: she wishes to 'make

the fatal plunge', to dive into her own unconscious, to 'breathe water' in order to find her self.

Of 'Point Shirley' (*Poems*, p. 110), Plath wrote that it was:

> Oddly powerful and moving to me in spite of the rigid formal structure. Evocative. Not so one-dimensional. (*Journals*, p. 291)

It is interesting that a sea poem is termed 'moving': clearly Plath associates the sea with an emotional response. When speaking of her childhood awareness of the sea, she said: 'I think one always goes back to something as vivid and colourful as this sort of experience' (*Poets in Partnership*). Throughout 'Point Shirley' the sea is the background to the I-speaker's childhood, yet it is a sea of threat:

> Steadily the sea
> Eats at Point Shirley.

The sea is devouring the land and with it the I-speaker's memories, perhaps 'swallowing' her childhood. According to Frobenius the motif of devouring belongs to the sun-myth, the sun is devoured by the sea and reborn at sunrise (Jung 5, p. 245); this is a link with the theme of rebirth. The grandmother in the poem is dead, yet the I-speaker is still seeking something:

> I would get from these dry-papped stones
> The milk your love instilled in them.

She is seeking to become a child again, to receive the love that as a child she received. The biographical equivalent for this is that:

> . . . the Schobers' was truly a *safe* house, the place where Sylvia was petted and coddled, no matter what the circumstances were at her own home. (Wagner-Martin 1987, p. 22)

The grandmother who kept 'house against/What the sluttish, rutted sea could do' was in opposition to the sea; with her death, the sea can encroach on 'this battered, obstinate spit/Of gravel'. The sea is a threat. Yet the grandmother shares the maternal aspect with the sea, and it is thus a haven. We see the grandmother as representing the conscious side of life, the laundry, the cooking, 'wheat loaves/And apple cakes'. The sea, the unconscious, is trying to overcome the conscious, a depiction of the conflict between the known and unknown. The I-speaker asks 'what is it/Survives, grieves/So . . .?': she is aware of the conflict. She sees herself as:

> Bones, bones only, pawed and tossed,
> A dog-faced sea.

Like the girl in 'Dream with Clam-Diggers' in 'her shabby travel garb', the I-speaker has journeyed back to the sea in order to find herself, and recognises the power of the sea, of the unconscious. 'Against both bar and tower the black sea runs': the sea is pitted against the natural and the man-made; the voyage of self-discovery can be hampered by such barriers.

'Suicide Off Egg Rock' (*Poems*, p. 115) is an illustration of Plath's ambivalent attitude to the sea as both threat and haven. The background, 'that landscape/Of imperfections', is both man-made and natural, 'the ochreous salt flats,/Gas tanks, factory stacks'. In this landscape, there is a sense of threat contained in the natural sunlight which 'struck the water like a damnation', perhaps light is being cast on the contents of the unconscious, of which the protagonist is afraid, he is 'damned'

by it. 'Everything shrank in the sun's corrosive/Ray but Egg Rock': the rock, again perhaps the barrier in the psyche, is unaffected by external events, it is blocking the light, insight into the unconscious. The sea is a 'blue wastage', implying an emptiness and possible threat, yet the speaker walks into the water as into a haven, and hears the 'forgetful surf creaming on those ledges.' The water will wash away the painful reminders of life, the rocky 'ledges' that are the barriers to self-understanding. As in 'Lorelei', there is a juxtaposing of the image of stone and water. Plath wrote of this poem:

> I began a poem, "Suicide Off Egg Rock," but set up such a strict verse form that all power was lost: my nose so close I couldn't see what I was doing. An anesthetizing of feeling. (*Journals*, p. 295)

As with other sea poems, she connects an emotion, or, in this instance, a lack of it, with water. The suicide in the poem is male, and the poem is written in the third person, a distancing device Plath employed in describing an emotionally fraught experience, as in, for example, 'The Detective' and 'The Courage of Shutting Up'. Yet the I-speaker is present in this poem in a manner which startles the reader: 'I am, I am, I am'. This personalises the poem and the third person is seen for what it is, a distancing device which protects the I-speaker from owning the desire to 'die', and thus to enter the sea of the unconscious. The man-made world is a 'landscape/Of imperfections his bowels were part of--'. Both natural and man-made landscapes threaten the man, who is 'as if stone-deaf, blindfold,/His body beached with the sea's garbage'. He is as if

already dead. His body is only a 'machine to breathe and beat forever.' Is this the death Plath envisaged when she defined it as 'inaccessibility to experience'?[5] The body is sensually dead, the man can neither listen nor see; perhaps he has never possessed these abilities: to be reborn is to receive the gift of 'hearing' and 'sight'.

He heard when he walked into the water
The forgetful surf creaming on those ledges.

These two final lines indicate that it is indeed those two senses which are apparent. It is not death but rebirth that is the outcome of this 'suicide'.

To summarise this section, the I-speaker is seeking an entry into the unconscious, a peaceful journey when the past can be obliterated; 'diving' into the sea has ceased to be an ending, it now contains the possibility of a new beginning; it is significant that in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock' everything 'shrank in the sun's corrosive/Ray but Egg Rock'; only the egg, the seed, is unaffected by the power of the sun. If, as I have suggested, sunlight is a metaphor for the light which is to be cast on the contents of the unconscious, then this light cannot damage the essential self, which remains invulnerable. The speaker has found an element of hope in the process of rebirth.

The *Ariel* Years

I suggested in the previous section that rebirth was implied in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock'; the final lines of 'A Life' (*Poems*, p. 149) could be that rebirth:

> And a drowned man, complaining of the great cold
> Crawls up out of the sea.

As in the earlier poem, the third person is used as a distancing device, although in the later poem the protagonist is female, a woman who 'is dragging her shadow in a circle/About a bald, hospital saucer': in the Jungian model the shadow is representative of the 'other', the 'inferior part of the personality.' (Jung 1963, p. 355) The hospital, which has a personal significance for Plath in connection with her own breakdown, is often the setting for poems concerned with rebirth. This 'other' has suffered, it is like 'a sheet of blank paper', it has no memories, they have been wiped out; it is flat, one dimensional. The shadow takes on the problems, 'a sort of private blitzkrieg', that the woman has suffered, but she has opted out: she 'lives quietly//With no attachments, like a foetus in a bottle'. She is like one dead: she has been born but has 'died' without ever growing to maturity; she is not at peace. 'The future is a gray seagull/Tattling in its cat-voice of departure, departure'. The presence of the sea is implied in the image of the seabird, here soaring over grey waters giving its lonely call, 'departure': the woman will be abandoned. While certain strong emotions no longer trouble her--grief and anger have been exorcised--age and terror, 'like nurses, attend her':

she has to live with the knowledge of growing old, perhaps of dying, and of this she is afraid. Death from old age, the natural process, is perceived as fear-inducing; yet in other poems, 'death' sought deliberately is welcomed. We are being offered two different types of death, the natural, the ultimate end for all living creatures and which is a fearful experience, and the metaphorical, which leads to rebirth, and is to be welcomed.

In this poem, the individual appearing from the sea is male; in the Jungian model this equates to a meeting with her *animus* for Plath, one of the four processes involved in individuation, which are:

1 experiencing of the shadow, the dark aspect of the self;

2 meeting with the animus/anima, the image of the other sex carried within each individual;

3 the appearance of Magna Mater, an archetypal image, leading to liberation from the mother;

4 the appearance of the self in which the inner and outer realities are joined. (Jacobi 1943, pp. 102 - 115)

I discuss these stages in detail in the following two chapters on the theme of rebirth.

In 'Tulips' (*Poems*, p. 160) Plath juxtaposes the images of stone and water:

> My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water
> Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them
> gently.

This is a rite involved with rebirth:

> The cool breeze or water flowing over her body is the primordial act of purification or cleansing of the sin of death, the essence of true baptism.[6]

This poem traces the I-speaker's rebirth experiences, her admission to hospital where she is 'learning peacefulness', her treatment from which she distances herself: 'I have nothing to do with explosions', her journey into her unconscious: 'the water went over my head', and her rebirth signalled by her awareness of the vividness of the colour of the tulips, her sense of sight, together with that of sound: the tulips fill up the air 'like a loud noise.' In my analysis of 'Suicide Off Egg Rock' I noted that for Plath it is access to the senses of sight and hearing which are associated with rebirth.

The sea is a haven in 'Tulips', in direct contrast with the sea of 'Blackberrying' and 'Finisterre' (*Poems*, pp. 168 and 169). In 'Blackberrying', the I-speaker has gone through an alley of brambles towards the sea, one 'more hook, and the berries and bushes end': she is implying an emptiness, on which she elaborates in the final stanza:

> The only thing to come now is the sea. . . .
> A last hook brings me
> To the hills' northern face, and the face is orange rock
> That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space
> Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silversmiths
> Beating and beating at an intractable metal.

As in earlier poems, stone--in this instance, rock--and water are juxtaposed, and as in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock', there is a linking of the sea and light, together with a suggestion that an external force is endeavouring to shape the unconscious, 'an intractable metal', into something other. In 'Finisterre', the sea is also

perceived as a void: the view is of 'the sea exploding/With no bottom or anything on the other side of it'. In both these poems the sea represents an absence. If we use the symbolism of the sea as a representation of the unconscious, then Plath is suggesting that the unconscious is an empty space, an unknown and, at this point, unknowable, void. The two senses of sight and hearing are again involved as they were in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock' and 'Tulips'; rebirth is implicit.

I noted in the introduction to this chapter that Jung indicates that water has a maternal significance, a suggestion which Graves echoes: 'the sea is the Universal Mother' (Graves 1961, p. 190). If the sea is a void, then such significance is lost: the maternal aspect of the sea, the 'womb' (Jung 5, p. 267), contains nothing. Perhaps the I-speaker is allowing for the possibility that rebirth may not occur, that the self may not be discovered. This is an element of the threat contained in the sea.

During this period, the connection between the moon and the sea was becoming clearer as Plath explored the association between her own femaleness and the influence of the moon. 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' (*Poems*, p. 172) was an exercise suggested by Hughes who subsequently commented that 'no poem can be a poem that is not a statement from the powers in control of our life' (Hughes 1966, pp. 86-87). He appears to be implying that there is some form of external force operating through the poet's voice. Kroll suggests that if 'the poem began as an exercise, it was ultimately an instrument of discovery and commitment, providing a

channel for those "powers"' (Kroll 1978, p. 43); she, too, suggests a controlling force.

In the poem, Plath takes an external experience and internalises it: the light of the moon shining on the tree becomes a light in the mind:

> This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary.
> The trees of the mind are black. . . .

The fumy, 'spiritous mists' which 'inhabit this place' describe the state of the I-speaker's mind: she 'simply cannot see where there is to get to.' At this point, the moon appears:

> The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,
> White as a knuckle and terribly upset.
> It drags the sea after it like a dark crime.

The link between the moon and femaleness is obvious, but the moon does not offer an entrance into the self, it has its own symbolism. Equally obvious is the I-speaker's dislike of this femaleness.

> The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.
> Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.

The earlier association had been with women's monthly cycle; by associating the moon with bats and owls, the Universal Mother is suggested:

> for bats and owls seem to be the creatures usually allotted to the two sexes . . . each man believes that not only his own life but the lives of his father, brothers, sons and so on are bound up with the lives of particular bats, and that therefore in protecting the bat species he is protecting the lives of all his male relations as well as his own. Similarly, each woman believes that the lives of her mother, sisters, daughters, and so forth, equally with her own, are bound up with the lives of particular owls, and that in guarding the owl species she is guarding the lives of all her female relations besides her own. [In discussion of an Australian culture] (Frazer 1924, p. 688)

The moon is perceived as controlling. This image is repeated in 'Three Women' (*Poems*, p. 176):

> It is she that drags the blood-black sea around
> Month after month, with its voices of failure.
> I am helpless as the sea at the end of her string.
> I am restless. Restless and useless. I, too, create
> corpses.

The use of the verb 'drag' in each poem repeats the dislike felt by the I-speaker for her femaleness, and with the sea symbolising the unconscious, she is suggesting that it is her femaleness that controls this unconscious, that she has no conscious influence. Perhaps this is the 'control' suggested by Hughes. Kroll hypothesises that, for Plath, the moon is that

> which symbolizes the deepest source and inspiration of the poetic vision, the poet's vocation, her female biology, and her role and fate as protagonist in a tragic drama. (Kroll 1978, p. 21)

In this one symbol, Kroll perceives a number of widely differing interpretations. For this critic, it is the moon which is the controlling influence for the poet.

Hughes believed that 'Three Women' should be heard 'as naive speech, rather than read as a literary artifact'.[7] This is puzzling. Is Hughes implying a naive *persona* or *personae*, or that it is 'art-less' speech? It seems presumptuous to dismiss a poem which explores birth and attitudes to motherhood in such a summary fashion. The poem offers some challenging perspectives.

> The face in the pool was beautiful, but not mine--

This is the Third Voice, that of the Girl.[8] The reflection is other than the original, the unconscious is other than the

conscious, the speaker is aware of a duality within herself. This duality is also apparent in the First Voice, that of the Wife:

> I talk to myself, myself only, set apart--
> Swabbed and lurid with disinfectants, sacrificial.
> Waiting lies heavy on my lids. It lies like sleep,
> Like a big sea.

Water is the medium of birth. She continues:

> . . . Far off, far off, I feel the first wave tug
> Its cargo of agony toward me, inescapable, tidal.
> And I, a shell, echoing on this white beach
> Face the voices that overwhelm, the terrible element.

This is the sea as threat, full of terror for the insignificant woman, the empty and echoing shell which lies on the shore, unable to escape from the inexorable fate of the water advancing, and unable to ignore the rebirth of herself which will occur with the birth of her child. She perceives herself on the edge of the tideline, the borderline between land and sea, between death and rebirth.

The Wife observes the newborn babes: 'I think they are made of water;' water is not only the medium of birth, it is creation itself. 'And God said, Let the water bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life' (Genesis 1:20). Can we adopt a mythological interpretation of the poem, the three voices as three aspects of the female psyche?

> Sylvia's radio play can be seen as a fascinating attempt on her part to ritualize the three major selves that formed her own character. (Butscher 1976, p. 376)

We can extend this interpretation:

> Toni Wolff, an early disciple of Jung's, sketches four structural forms of the feminine which she calls the Mother, the Hetaira, the Amazon, and the Medium . . . every woman

> potentially has all four structural forms, although one or two are more readily accessible to her than the others and become her pattern of functional adaptation. (Ulanov 1971, p. 194)

Ulanov elaborates Wolff's definitions, pointing out that the forms may also refer to the masculine *anima*, and detailing the dominant archetype for each form, together with other aspects. These archetypes are as follows:

> for the Mother type, the Great Mother;
> for the Hetaira type, the Great Father;
> for the Amazon type, the Virgin;
> for the Medial Woman type, the Wise Woman.[9]

While there are only three voices in the play, there is a fourth voice which is that of the poet herself; perhaps we should consider this as the Medial Woman:

> "Medium" means neutral, neither precisely one thing nor another, it is something in-between, intermediate, an agent, a mediator, a means, not an end. (Ulanov 1971, p. 208)

The medial voice is represented by the text itself: it is the means through which the other voices are heard. All are part of one, yet individual in their particular expression.

If we use Wolff's definitions, then we are left with the Mother, the Hetaira and the Amazon as archetypes for the Wife, the Secretary and the Girl, and it would seem that the Wife, fits the type of Mother, the archetype of which 'induces in a woman maternal cherishing'.

> A maternal woman, in this sense, can support people and ideas without condescension, can make space for that which needs to grow, and can provide security for what is still unaccomplished and needs room for psychic development. (Ulanov 1971, p. 198)

The Wife says of herself:

I am slow as the world. I am very patient,
Turning through my time, the suns and stars
Regarding me with attention. . . .

When I walk out, I am a great event.
I do not have to think, or even rehearse.
What happens to me will happen without attention.

She sees herself as a part of the universe, a part of the natural cycles of life.

Of the Amazon type, Ulanov makes the following comments:

> The feminine structured as Amazon produces a personality which is self-contained and independent . . . The dominant archetype is that of the Virgin . . . [which] constellates an independence based on fidelity to the feminine principle, one which yields an identity where the woman feels she is a person in her own right and not simply a counterpart to the male. (Ulanov 1971, p. 205)

Both the Secretary and the Girl comment on their separateness from men; the Secretary says:

The faceless faces of important men.

It is these men I mind:
They are so jealous of anything that is not flat! They are
jealous gods
That would have the whole world flat because they are.

She sees women as other than men who are 'jealous gods', they are jealous of a woman's life-giving abilities. The Girl comments:

I am a mountain now, among mountainy women.
The doctors move among us as if our bigness
Frightened the mind. They smile like fools.
They are to blame for what I am, and they know it.
They hug their flatness like a kind of health.

She, too, sees women as other than men, but her view is that men fear women, for the same reason that they are jealous of them.

It is not clear which of the two can be defined as the Amazon,

and because of the nature of the model, one type will dominate and be easily identifiable, the others will be less formed.

Of the final type, the Hetaira, the companion, Ulanov notes that she relates 'to her children as individuals rather than as a group', she is 'the *puella aeterna*, the "father's daughter"' and is symbolized in images of 'nymph, seductress, harlot, or witch ' (Ulanov 1971, pp. 203-4) Of her children, the Secretary says:

> . . . . The faces have no features.
> They are bald and impossible, like the face of my children,
> Those little sick ones that elude my arms.

She sees her children as a group in contrast to the Girl who speaks of her child: 'I see her in my sleep, my red, terrible girl', her 'daughter has no teeth' and 'is a small island, asleep and peaceful'. This is a far more individual approach to a child than that of the Secretary; we can consider the Girl as the Hetaira and the Secretary as the Amazon.

We should remember that, according to this model, 'every woman potentially has all four structural forms' and that these types 'form the stage on which a woman may live out her personal drama'. (Ulanov 1971, pp. 194 and 195) In exploring the theme of motherhood through these different voices, Plath was exploring her own psyche, and we should not expect a total differentiation between the types, rather that there should be some overlap, some confusion, the edges of one blurring into another. In my introductory chapter, I suggested that we need to remember the gender-biased nature of Jungian theory, and that to interpret a female artist's work needed a slight shift in perspective. This

shift is illustrated in Toni Wolff's four definitions of the female. Wolff worked with Jung for many years, and was aware of the need for an altered perspective.

'Three Women' is a meditation on maternity and birth, and in this poem, the image of water is used as a metaphor for sleep, the sleep which precedes birth; water is perceived as a threat, a 'terrible element', again prior to birth. Plath uses the image, together with that of the moon, as a metaphor for menstruation, 'the blood-black sea', and water is also perceived as the source of life. The First Voice, the Wife, asks:

> What is it that flings these innocent souls at us?
> Look, they are so exhausted. they are all flat out
> In their canvas-sided cots, names tied to their wrists. . .
>
> I think they are made of water; they have no expression.
> Their features are sleeping, like light on quiet water.

The babies are perceived as 'souls', and water becomes a metaphor for the soul. I suggested earlier that when Plath juxtaposes light and water, this implies the light that is to be cast on the contents of the unconscious. Whereas in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock', the contents of the unconscious were perceived as 'damning', those of the babies are peaceful, 'like light on quiet water.'

'Lady Lazarus' (*Poems*, p. 244) is one of the most anthologised of all Plath's poems, and in the context of the present discussion, there is one particular phrase we should consider: 'I rocked shut/As a seashell', a description of the I-speaker's suicide attempt. The use of 'rock' echoes Plath's earlier use of this as a metaphor for a life-problem; in this instance the I-speaker's

problems were overwhelming; she could not overcome the psychic barriers in order to understand herself and thus avoid the repetitive suicide attempts. 'One year in every ten/I manage it--'. 'Shell' suggests the I-speaker as an empty hollow, an image used in 'Three Women': The Wife perceives herself as 'a shell, echoing on this white beach'. In 'Ocean 1212-W' Plath refers to a collection of shells found on the shore as 'a garbage of shells.' (*Dreams*, p. 120) She considers them to be the sea's waste, that which is no longer needed, and as empty vessels that once housed a living creature. This is a repeat of the spatial metaphor which occured in profusion in 'Poem for a Birthday'. A hole 'can be something missing, a place to go into, a space to be filled' (Hall 1980, p. 88). We are to understand that the I-speaker perceives herself, at the moment of suicide, as a void. she has to turn inwards on herself to find her self. A shell is also a shield, a protection for that living creature from the perils of living. As with other images, notably the stone and water, and as Kroll suggests, the moon, there are a number of different interpretations.

We should note the wordplay on 'I': is the 'eye' shut to avoid 'seeing'? A woman struggling for spiritual development drew an eye on the sea's horizon, of which Jung commented that it was:

> the birth of a new insight or conscious awareness (eye) from the depths of the unconscious (sea). Here the eye signifies the self. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 380)

A shell suggests listening to the sea and thus hearing one's own heartbeat, gaining an awareness of one's own reality. This is a

repetition of the two senses involved in rebirth. Plath's images can be explored in detail in order to yield a multiplicity of associations, some of which are particular to the poet, others which we, the readers, impose ourselves.

In 'Death & Co.' (*Poems*, p. 254) there is a close association between birth and death; one of the two visitors exhibits:

> The birthmarks that are his trademark--
> The scald scar of water,
> The nude
> Verdigris of the condor.

It is death who exhibits birthmarks: clearly the I-speaker recognises the close proximity of the two experiences, in death is birth, or rebirth. The phrase 'scald scar of water' is a paraphrase for 'baptism of fire', a link with birth and also the concept of passing through difficulties to emerge stronger and changed in some manner. This first visitor is likened to a bird, with the I-speaker as the prey, 'I am red meat', a reiteration of the theme of devouring. The second visitor is chastised as a:

> Bastard
> Masturbating a glitter,
> He wants to be loved.

He is despised for the ephemeral quality of his loving, he can only consider himself and his pleasure. One of the most significant aspects of this poem is that both visitors are seen as male. Plath commented:

> This poem is about the double or schizophrenic nature of death--the marmoreal coldness of Blake's death mask, say, hand in glove with the fearful softness of worms, water and other katabolists. I imagine these two aspects of death as two men, two business friends, who have come to call. (Notes to *Poems*, p. 294) [These comments were made in a BBC broadcast.]

Death for the I-speaker has more than one face, but both are seen as devouring, the one of the body, the other of the emotions, leaving the I-speaker as the 'dead bell'. If 'bell' is a verb, then the dead still have a voice; perhaps this is the 'mysterious language' used in the epigraph to 'On the Decline of Oracles':

> Inside a ruined temple the broken statue of a god spoke a mysterious language. (*Journals*, p. 211)

In terms of the process of individuation, in 'Death & Co.' Plath is attempting to integrate the *animus*, she perceives more than one aspect, but fears both. By personifying death as male, she is recognising that she has to encounter it in order to be reborn, she has to integrate this aspect of her personality in order that it can be whole.

In the two poems, 'Suicide Off Egg Rock' and 'A Life', Plath uses the sea to symbolise the unconscious into which the speaker has to plunge to find her identity; the sea becomes the medium of rebirth from which the individual emerges and the sea is both threat and haven: the process of looking deep into oneself is one which is frightening, yet to know oneself completely gives the individual a sense of security. It is no coincidence that Plath's own notes on Jung contain a reference to this effect:

> . . . the birth of personality in oneself has a therapeutic effect. It is as if a river that had run to waste in sluggish side-streams and marshes suddenly found its way back to its proper bed, or as if a stone lying on a germinating seed were lifted away so that the shoot could begin its natural growth.'[10]

In this one quotation we have a link between water imagery, stone imagery and the theme of rebirth.

The Final Months

The final phase of Plath's work is one which demonstrates a change in her use of imagery, both in terms of the stone, as already discussed, and of water. Can we consider this change as an indication of her awareness of the birth of her self? Hughes has suggested 'Poem for a Birthday' as such a birth,'' but it is more appropriate to view this as the conception of the self, since it is not until the final months that the new self emerges in full strength, expressed in the poetry. The final placing of the bee sequence in Plath's own ordering of *Ariel* indicates her knowledge of the struggle taking place within.

We might expect a profusion of water imagery in this final phase, water as the birth medium, and as representative of the unconscious; this expectation is fulfilled.

> They threaten
> To let me through to a heaven
> Starless and fatherless, a dark water.
>
> 'Sheep in Fog' (*Poems*, p. 262)

It is not clear, perhaps intentionally, to what 'they' refers: is it the hills of the first line which 'step off into whiteness', the bones of the previous stanza, which 'hold a stillness' or 'the far/Fields' which melt the I-speaker's heart? Perhaps it is all the plural nouns which precede this final stanza, a stanza full of significance: there is the contradiction of 'threaten' and 'heaven', a heaven without light, without the god-figure, starless 'and fatherless', a heaven which is 'a dark water'. The

unconscious is truly the depths, unfathomable, fear-inspiring, but it is this 'dark water' which the I-speaker must explore.

In 'Paralytic' (*Poems*, p. 266), the unconscious is preventing the I-speaker from being sensually aware, an awareness which, in other poems, as I have indicated, is taken to be indicative of rebirth.

> The still waters
> Wrap my lips,
>
> Eyes, nose and ears,
> A clear
> Cellophane I cannot crack.

In these late poems the I-speaker is ambivalent towards rebirth: in 'Sheep in Fog' she is aware how close the rebirth is; in 'Paralytic' she is aware that she is not yet born, the birth waters have not broken, her senses are unable to respond. If we use Plath's own definition of death, 'inaccessibility to experience' (see note [5] above), then at this point the I-speaker is 'dead' to physical sensations. In the final stanza, as I noted in the previous chapter, she likens herself to the 'claw of the magnolia'--there is a sense of threat in 'claw'--which is drunk 'on its own scents'. Plath had commented to Alvarez that these late poems had to be read out loud, 'I want you to *hear* them' (Alvarez 1971, p. 31); to obtain the maximum enjoyment from such wordplay as 'its own scents', we need to both hear and see the words. The claw asks 'nothing of life'; perhaps we can add 'but asks something of death', asks to be reborn from death, as is the phoenix of 'Lady Lazarus'? We should note that the petals of any flower form a bowl, another instance of woman as vessel,

woman as womb, capable of giving birth to herself (Hall 1980, p. 49). The I-speaker is implying in the final stanzas of this poem that she sees herself as not yet reborn; like a buddha, she has no wants or desires. It is her destiny as a woman to be reborn:

> All great religious traditions hold out this essentially feminine promise of the possibility of rebirth. The work of woman is transformation: making something out of nothing: giving form to formless energy. (Hall 1980, p. 169)

Certainly for Plath motherhood created an awareness of 'making something out of nothing'; when introducing 'You're' she commented that it was about a baby 'developing from nothingness into a human being.' (*The Living Poet*)

In these last poems the I-speaker is accepting the different aspects of her self. Whereas in 'Tale of a Tub' she saw 'the stranger in the lavatory mirror', in 'Gigolo' (*Poems*, p. 267), she no longer finds the image threatening:

> All the fall of water an eye
> Over whose pool I tenderly
> Lean and see me.

I noted the wordplay on 'eye' and 'I' in the introductory chapter; for the I-speaker the insight gained from 'seeing' within the self is not to be feared, it is to be welcomed: 'tenderly' suggests a nurturing aspect.

> The sea slides back,
> The mirrors are sheeted.
>
> 'Contusion' (*Poems*, p. 271)

The sheeting of mirrors has connotations of death. Frazer comments on the widespread custom of covering mirrors after a death has occurred:

> It is feared that the soul, projected out of the person in the shape of his reflection in the mirror, may be carried off by the ghost of the departed, which is commonly supposed to linger about the house till the burial. (Frazer 1924, p. 192)

We can consider the reflective surface, whether of mirror or water as an analogy for the soul:

> Mirrors, like lake surfaces, glass, and the eye of another person, are thought of as reflecting, abstracting, and containing the soul of the onlooker. (Hall 1980, p. 234)

There are different possible interpretations for these poems: either the I-speaker has lost her shadow, her soul, and hence is unreal, 'dead'; alternatively, the other self has been integrated and the I-speaker has been reborn whole, which is the fourth process of individuation when the inner and outer realities are joined (Jacobi 1943, p. 115). The line: 'The sea slides back' suggests the latter construction, the unconscious has become part of the conscious. These late poems are an exploration of the psychic process through which Plath was passing during these months; they are highly significant and should be viewed as an announcement of the birth of the self.

In 'Words' (*Poems*, p. 270) the I-speaker is aware of the new life:

> The sap
> Wells like tears, like the
> Water striving
> To re-establish its mirror
> Over the rock
>
> That drops and turns . . .

She is aware that there is now no sense of duality, the 'other' has been integrated. In the poem 'In Plaster' (*Poems*, p. 158)

this 'other' was present, there were 'two of me now'. While it is not necessary to concur with Hughes' statement that 'her separate poems build up into one long poem' (Hughes 1966, p. 81), the rebirth theme is paramount in these last poems, and forms a unifying image throughout the *oeuvre*.

Conclusion

> It will take months to get my inner world peopled, and the people moving. How else to do it but plunge out of this safe scheduled time-clock wage-check world into my own voids. (*Journals*, p. 180)

Plath wrote this in January 1958. She recognised the necessity, for her, of looking within herself, at that point perceived as an empty space; her use of the diving metaphor suggests her recognition of water as a metaphor for the unconscious. The sea, the unconscious, is a threat because it is unknown, the 'voids' in the above passage; it is a haven because of the childhood associations, it 'spoke of miracles and distances' (*Dreams*, p. 117). It is also by the sea that a supremely significant event occurs: Plath learns that her mother, whom she views as having 'abandoned' her, will return with a baby. The child Sylvia recognises 'the *separateness* of everything' (*Dreams*, p. 120). With the benefit of a number of years' distance, she perceives herself as having gone through, early in her life, a process which usually takes a considerable time: 'it is years before the child ceases to confuse itself with the universe.' (Fromm 1942, p. 21)

If we look at the multiplicity of images associated with water, its changeability, yet paradoxically its changelessness, its movement, yet its quality of stillness, its depths and shallows, its anger and peace, its many, many voices, of sea, lake, pool, river, stream, torrent, waterfall, but throughout its constancy, it is surely this final quality which caused Plath to consider the sea as evocative of her childhood. When we recall her prose writing 'Ocean 1212-W', it is scarcely surprising that the sea should represent both threat and haven: it is a haven because of this quality of constancy, of changelessness, yet a threat because of the ability to change so swiftly from calm, smooth flow to raging cascade.

Again, it is hardly surprising that Plath should consider it representative of her own unconscious, she who was so subject to mood swings and whose writing reflected those changes as the water reflects the changing pattern of the sky, giving to the observer an impression of increased light intensity far greater than the original. So with the artist's unconscious: it gave back experiences intensified many times by being reflected through this medium of great depths and shallows, of great calm, yet great rage. Her experiences were those of many of her female contemporaries: her writing made of those experiences a form beyond the event, internal or external and leading the reader into her/his own unconscious. It is this ability to take the reader with her into these depths that is one of the reasons for Plath's continuing appeal. Through her senses, our mundane

experiences are transformed, intensified to an almost unbearable level. Through her writing she endeavoured to share with her reader that intensity of emotion, of response that she herself experienced when her life events were filtered through the water of her unconscious.

The aim of this chapter has been to study Plath's use of water imagery and how she develops such imagery. It has been noted that she viewed the sea as both threat and haven, and if we look at some of the many adjectives she uses in relation to this element, we can see that this double view permeates her poems from the early juvenilia to the final work of 1963. There is the 'black wave', the energy of which may 'drag you to drown' ('Go get the goodly squab', *Poems*, p. 313) in contrast with 'the rare river' in which 'the tilting fish' wink and laugh ('Love is a Parallax', *Poems*, p. 330). The sea is seen as 'dark as anger' ('Channel Crossing', *Poems*, p. 26), yet it is also a 'friendly/Element' ('Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbor', *Poems*, p. 97); there is an animal quality to it, it is like 'some huge, radiant animal' (*Dreams*, p. 119); it is 'bull-snouted' ('The Bull of Bendylaw', *Poems*, p. 108) and 'dog-faced', 'sluttish, rutted' ('Point Shirley', *Poems*, pp. 110 and 111); there is also a human aspect, it has its 'dissatisfactions' ('Elm', *Poems*, p. 192), its 'incoherences' ('Medusa', Poems, p. 224).

That she views water as the unconscious is clear not only from her own description of this--she refers to the sea as 'the artist's subconscious' (*Journals*, p. 222)-- but also because of

the references to diving, a metaphor for exploring the unconscious. 'One of Psyche's first unsuccessful attempts to deal with her misery was to throw herself into a river.' (Hall 1980, p. 24)

> Psyche ventured out of the unlit realm of not knowing, an unconscious, all-embracing place, where fascination holds sway. Step by step she moved through that dark of loss. By error and by trial she came eventually face to face with her other half. . . . she had lost herself and found it again. Her "other half" turns out to be not only a mate who vanishes during the nine months of a wearisome pregnant search, but also the half of self that is seen as if in a mirror, an opposite but equal reflection. (Hall 1980, pp. 20 and 21)

Plath's search for her self resembles Psyche's journey.

The rebirth of her self, 'the wholeness of the personality' (Jung 1963, p. 187) was the final stage in the process of individuation which Plath explored through her poetry.

FIVE

THE THEME OF REBIRTH I

Introduction

I have suggested throughout this thesis that for Plath, rebirth refers to the ultimate stage of the Jungian process of individuation; this has been prompted by my own reading of Jung and Plath's *oeuvre*, in which I believe she traces her attempts to discover a new and transcendent self. Hughes commented that Plath's self development could be termed 'a classic case of the alchemical individuation of the self.'[1] I have also suggested that 'Poem for a Birthday' should be viewed as the 'conception' of the new self expressed through the poetic voice; the 'birth' is not apparent until the final group of poems. In the following passage, Hughes perceives Plath's poetry as a record of the rebirth of her self, although he suggests the 'birth' occurs earlier than I have proposed: 'the "birth" recorded in that poem, "The Stones," . . . happened in a very real sense, in November 1959':[2]

> All her poems are in a sense by-products. Her real creation was that inner gestation and eventual birth of a new self-conquering self, to which her journal bears witness, and which proved itself so overwhelmingly in the *Ariel* poems of 1962. If this is the most important task a human being can undertake (and it must surely be one of the most difficult), then this is the importance of her poems, that they provide such an intimate, accurate embodiment of the whole process from beginning to end--or almost to the end.[3]

Hughes does not explain his term, 'self-conquering self'; the Jungian definition of the self is that which I noted at the close of the previous chapter, 'the wholeness of the personality' (Jung

1963, p. 187), although we can perhaps consider it in connection with the death of the ego, a discussion to which I return later in this chapter. However, Hughes does recognise the problematic nature of the 'birth of a new self-conquering self'; Jolande Jacobi, a Jungian interpreter, notes that the process of individuation is a road 'not suitable nor traversable for everyone.' (Jacobi 1943, p. 101)

In this chapter, I examine various aspects of the theme of rebirth, and subsequently analyse certain of the poems, culminating in a detailed discussion of 'Poem for a Birthday', the sequence which closed Plath's first collection and which is, I believe, of great significance in a consideration of this theme.

The Process of Individuation 1

In the previous chapter, I noted the stages involved in individuation; in my analysis of Plath's work, I am not suggesting that such stages can be discerned in a chronological order, since the experiences out of which the poems were created often antedate the resultant work. I am suggesting that the stages can be traced in her use of particular images throughout the *oeuvre*, and that the archetypal pattern of rebirth is a theme to which Plath returns repeatedly in her exploration of the stages of individuation.

Jung defines individuation as 'the psychological process that makes of a human being an "individual"--a unique, indivisible unit or "whole man."' (Jung 1940, p. 3) Do we assume that women are included? Jung's writing on women does betray his bias which is almost exclusively of a cultural nature: he notes, for example, that 'those women who can achieve something important for the love of a *thing* are most exceptional, because this does not really agree with their nature' (Jung 1986, p. 60), and that if a woman takes up a masculine profession, 'studying and working like a man, woman is doing something not wholly in accord with, if not directly injurious to, her feminine nature.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 59) Is the profession of poet masculine? Juhasz comments:

> Being a woman poet is a peculiar social and psychological situation . . . To be a woman poet in our society is a double-bind situation, one of conflict and strain. For the words "woman" and "poet" denote opposite and contradictory qualities and roles. Traditionally, the poet is a man, and "poetry" is the poems that men write. (Juhasz 1976, p. 1)

The woman cannot succeed as poet, the poet cannot succeed as woman. According to Graves, 'in primitive European belief it was only kings, chieftains and poets, or magicians, who were privileged to be reborn.' (Graves 1961, p 98) We know from the journals that Plath read Graves: 'Read a bit of William Dunbar, a bit of *The White Goddess*' (*Journals*, p. 221). She perceived herself as undergoing a form of rebirth, as I illustrate later in this chapter, and recognised something of her own talent, describing herself as 'a potentially talented & mature adult' (*Journals*, p. 171) We can understand a part of the strain that the identity of 'woman' and role of 'poet' imposed on Plath.

'Individuation is the core process in analytical psychology.' (Wehr 1988, p. 49) Rather than discussing this process only from Jung's writings, I propose to rely on Wehr's interpretation because, as with Freudian psychoanalysis, the original bias is inevitably towards the male, despite the fact that the majority of the patients of both Freud and Jung were female. With the development of feminist theories, it is of value to consider more recent interpretations. Wehr points out that both Jungians and feminists agree on the issue of male dominance in Western culture and this is her starting point:

> patriarchy, understood as male dominance of public life and thought-systems, exists in Western culture and is reflected in all its institutions, including religion, psychology, and language. (Wehr 1988, p. 9)

An essential aspect of Jung's discussion of the process of individuation is the concept of the *animus/anima*, being respectively 'the man in a woman' and 'the woman in a man'. (Jung 1940, p. 19) Wehr notes that Jung's own discussions of the *anima* 'confusingly intermingle anima and the psychology of women' which leads to 'two blurred agendas'. (Wehr 1988, p. 104) Jung does not separate his own *anima* projections from the psychology of women, nor, as would be expected, does he take account of patriarchal influence on such projections and on women's sense of self. Jung's concept of the *animus* is one which we should consider with caution.

'Individuation consists in coming to know the multiple personalities'. (Wehr 1988, p. 54) We can observe that some of Plath's work is an exploration of these personalities, that the

cast of characters with which the reader is presented such as the three women, the disquieting muses, the surgeon, the male suicide, are all aspects of her own personality which, in undergoing the process of individuation, she is attempting to integrate. The first of this inner cast of characters to be encountered is the shadow, 'the "negative," often despised and repressed side of the personality' (Wehr 1988, p.59).

> The character that summarizes a person's uncontrolled emotional manifestations consists, in the first place, of his inferior qualities or peculiarities. . . . When people are not at their best, such flaws become clearly visible. I have called the inferior and less commendable part of a person the *shadow*. (Jung 1940, p. 20)

Jung believed the shadow could only be faced in a relationship with a member of the same sex. We should therefore expect that in her dealings with other women, Plath would be coming to terms with this, and 'In Plaster' (*Poems*, p. 158) is an illustration, although, in this poem, the I-speaker perceives that domination rather than integration is the aim:

> I used to think we might make a go of it together--
> After all, it was a kind of marriage, being so close.
> Now I see it must be one or the other of us.

The I-speaker opts for the known: 'one day I shall manage without her': at this point, there is no possibility of integration of the two selves. The other, the unknown, despite having the same shape, has different qualities, she 'doesn't need food', she is 'much whiter and unbreakable', she has characteristics of tidiness and calmness and patience; yet despite her dependence on the I-speaker without whom 'she wouldn't exist', the other 'wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior'. But there is

interdependence: 'I still depended on her, though I did it regretfully' because she had 'supported me for so long I was quite limp--/I had even forgotten how to walk or sit'. The I-speaker feels the need to destroy this other, in order that she may survive; she believes that it is not union she seeks, but dominance to the extent of annihilation of the other. We can now understand Jacobi's comment quoted earlier on the unsuitability of the process of individuation for some (Jacobi 1943, p. 101): there is a danger apparent in the dominance of one aspect, rather than the integration of all aspects of the personality.

Plath also explores this aspect of personality in *The Bell Jar*:

> Joan had walk privileges, Joan had shopping privileges, Joan had town privileges. I gathered all my news of Joan into a little, bitter heap, though I received it with surface gladness. Joan was the beaming double of my old best self, specially designed to follow and torment me. (*Bell*, p. 217)

Here Plath has inverted the process, viewing herself as the shadow, Joan as the better part. However, Joan is also 'like a dim and inferior acquaintance' (*Bell*, p. 218) and later Esther considers

> if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose. (*Bell*, p. 231)

Joan is separate, yet at the same time connected. Esther's attempt to integrate the shadow is finally achieved when Joan commits suicide: she is found by the frozen ponds, water as metaphor for the unconscious: Joan's unconscious no longer exists.

> By killing off her own primary double, Sylvia Plath rearranged her own experience so that at the end her heroine could be free of her bell jar of "stifling distortions" and become psychically reborn.[4]

The phrase "psychically reborn" is similar to one which Plath herself used:

> A time of darkness, despair, disillusion--so black only as the inferno of the human mind can be--symbolic death, and numb shock, then the painful agony of slow rebirth and psychic regeneration . . . [5]

Symbolic death and subsequent rebirth are part of the initiation ritual, when the individual's identity

> is temporarily dismembered or dissolved in the collective unconscious. From this state he is then ceremonially rescued by the rite of the new birth. . . . [this] provides the novice with a "rite of passage" from one stage of life to the next, whether it is from early childhood or from early to late adolescence and from then to maturity.[6]

Following integration of the shadow--'I was my own woman. The next step was to find the proper sort of man' (*Bell*, p. 235)--is the meeting with the *animus/anima*; Jung perceived this as emerging primarily from the collective unconscious as opposed to the shadow, which emanates from the personal unconscious.

> Individuals' anima or animus images are constructed, in part, on their experience of the opposite sex--especially in early life. . . . since anima and animus are archetypal, they draw their power from a much deeper source than the personal unconscious. . . . (1) personal experience; (2) an innate, unconscious, genetically based contrasexuality in each person . . . (3) a collective, inherited image of the opposite sex, transmitted through mythology, fairy tales . . . (Wehr 1988, pp. 63-64)

This aspect of the unconscious is encountered in a relationship with a member of the opposite sex; in Plath's work it can be seen in poems such as 'Electra on Azalea Path' (*Poems*, p. 116) and

'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (*Poems*, p. 170) and in her prose in scenes such as that with Marco in *The Bell Jar*. (*Bell*, pp. 110-116)

Within Jung's framework the next stage in the process of individuation is the liberation of the individual from the mother, followed by the near extinction of the ego; it is at this point that the new self is born, a self which contains elements of the shadow and the *animus/anima* and in which both masculine and feminine aspects are reconciled. Here we have reached the critical aspect in relation to Plath's work, the point of rebirth. In the work we would expect to find the encountering of the shadow through Plath's work on relationships with women; the meeting with the *animus* through work on relationships with men; and ultimately to witness the near-death of the ego before the rebirth of the whole personality. This is possibly the point at which Hughes' 'self-conquering self' appears: his comment is naturally from his own viewpoint. Perhaps men need to experience this annihilation of the ego. In his introduction to the *Journals*, he comments, with hindsight, that Plath had 'a readiness, even a need, to sacrifice everything to the new birth', a new birth which 'is the death of the old false self in the birth of the new real one.' (*Journals*, p. xiv).

With regard to this near-death of the ego, Wehr states that feminist theories 'differentiate between the ego in men and in women. Jung does not.' (Wehr 1988, p. 101) A woman's ego, because of her inferior role in society is not as strong as a

man's and therefore to require the near-death of the ego may be too damaging to a woman; this is not 'a "healthy" self-abnegation; it is closer to socially prescribed masochism.' (Wehr 1988, p. 102) Women 'need to die to the false self system that patriarchy has imposed on them, whatever form it has taken'. (Wehr 1988, p. 102) Such a death would precede the birth of the true self. Plath was aware she was exploring her psyche through her work; Wagner-Martin cites Plath: "I did not believe that psychic regeneration was possible. Then, unbelievably, a slow regenerating joy began to grow out of my gradual determination to live creatively." (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 113) We can perhaps consider 'regeneration' as the fourth form of rebirth ascribed by Jung, that of *renovatio*. These forms I discuss later in the chapter.

Considerations of Rebirth 1

Plath's rebirth, the birth of her self, is the result of the exploration of her own inner recesses. It becomes difficult to separate the work from the biography, the latter in some instances giving rise to the former: the events of Plath's life are the context and sometimes the content of the work and as such are of vital significance, which does not necessarily mean a direct link between the two, rather that the event, the experience, becomes the springboard for the poem:

> the importance of Plath's work lies precisely in her alteration and heightening of autobiographical experience. (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 107)

In terms of her poetry, the rebirth of her self led to poems different from those of *The Colossus*, as has been noted by a number of critics.[7] That rebirth had a personal significance for Plath we know from her journals and other prose writings. In 1957 she commented:

> That's my trouble. I see it very clear now: bridging the gap between a bright published adolescent which died at 20 and a potentially talented & mature adult which begins writing about 25. (*Journals*, p. 171)

It is strange that she should refer to herself as an object, 'which', rather than 'who'; possibly this connects with the use of the third person as a distancing device in the poems. In the above passage, Plath recognises something of her own talent; by objectifying herself, she distances herself from the comment. At this point, she perceives adulthood as a time of rebirth. In the same year, she wrote to her mother from Yorkshire: 'I am just beginning to feel reborn.' (*Letters*, p. 316) This was written when she was staying in Yorkshire with Hughes' parents and after she had finished her exams at Cambridge. If we consider rebirth as a transformation process, what is the transformation that occurs in Yorkshire? From student to writer? From single woman to wife? We should note that there is an omission at the beginning of the paragraph following her comment. Possibly in this instance, the transformation of place relates to an inner transformation. I shall discuss this aspect of change in connection with the poem 'The Great Carbuncle' later in this chapter.

After the birth of her first child, Frieda, Plath wrote to her mother:

> I have the queerest feeling of having been reborn with Frieda--it's as if my real, rich, happy life only started just about then. (*Letters*, p. 450)

She equated the child with innocence, it was for her evidence of the fresh start she seemed to require, the rebirth of herself:

> Whenever we are about to move, this stirring and excitement comes, as if the old environment would keep the sludge and inertia of the self, and the bare new self slip shining into a better life. . . . (*Journals*, p. 329)

Her poems are evidence of her inner explorations, as are her novel and short stories. In *The Bell Jar* there are a number of references to the innocent state of the new-born self:

> The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt, and when I stepped out at last and wrapped myself in one of the big, soft, white, hotel bath-towels, I felt pure and sweet as a new baby. (*Bell*, p. 22)

This passage is full of images of pregnancy: the bath as metaphor for the womb, the water as cleanser and purifier, and as the birth waters themselves: Esther emerges 'reborn'. Of similar significance is the description of Esther's reaction to the insulin treatment:

> And when Mrs Bannister held the cup to my lips, I fanned the hot milk out on my tongue as it went down, tasting it luxuriously, the way a baby tastes its mother. (*Bell*, p. 213)

It is from this moment that Esther begins her recovery. The above passages were written after Plath had experienced pregnancy and childbirth, and while we can understand that in pregnancy 'something becomes real that did not exist before' (Homans 1986,

p. 26), Plath's awareness of rebirth predates her pregnancies, as I have already illustrated.

In order to discuss rebirth from a Jungian point of view, some knowledge of his thinking is needed:

> Rebirth is not a process that we can in any way observe. We can neither measure nor weigh nor photograph it. It is entirely beyond sense perception. We have to do here with a purely *psychic* reality, which is transmitted to us only indirectly through personal statements. One speaks of rebirth; one professes rebirth; one is filled with rebirth. This we accept as sufficiently real. We are not concerned here with the question: is rebirth a tangible process of some sort? We have to be content with its psychic reality. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 116)

From Plath's writings, we know that she 'speaks of rebirth' as I have already noted. I suggest that we can consider her *oeuvre* as the transmission of what was, for her, a psychic reality. Jung notes different meanings for the concept of rebirth:

> The five different forms which I am going to enumerate could probably be added to if one were to go into greater detail, but I venture to think that my definitions cover at least the cardinal meanings. Jung 9, Part 1, p. 113)

These five different forms are:

1 Metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls; 'one's life is prolonged in time by passing through different bodily existences'.

2 Reincarnation, implying the continuity of personality. 'As a rule, reincarnation means rebirth in a human body.'

3 Resurrection, meaning 'a re-establishment of human existence after death'.

4 Rebirth (*renovatio*); this may be 'a renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions'. Another aspect is 'essential transformation, i.e., total rebirth of the individual', a transmutation.

5 Indirect rebirth, where the individual participates indirectly by witnessing or taking part in, 'some rite of transformation'.[8]

We should hold these different forms in mind when reading Plath in order to decide to which particular form she is referring, since for her, rebirth does not always have the same interpretation. For example, in her notes on Plato, Plath comments that 'in the spiritual realm, we may find comfort in the promise of a Christian Heaven or a happier transmigration of the soul, the next time round': the Christian and Platonic together.[9] In 'Lady Lazarus' (*Poems*, p. 244) she is obviously referring to resurrection, although one critic comments:

> at times her use of the idea of resurrection has more to do with fertility rites and things she picked up by reading in mythology and collections of folktales, than with any obvious theological meaning. (Homberger 1977, p. 162)

In this poem she also refers to the phoenix myth:

> Out of the ash
> I rise with my red hair
> And I eat men like air.

Rosenthal sees this as rebirth 'couched as a threat: she will rise in her demonic fury from the grave; she is a witch who 'eats men'.' (Rosenthal 1967, p. 81) Resurrection is referred to in an earlier poem:

> . . . . A body of whiteness
> Rots, and smells of rot under its headstone
> Though the body walk out in clean linen.
>
> 'Moonrise' (*Poems*, p. 98)

The phoenix myth appears even earlier in Juvenilia in 'Love is a Parallax' (*Poems*, p. 329) in which the 'cycling phoenix never stops', a comment on the cyclic nature of life for which Plath

uses the metaphor of a wound 'that heals/only to reopen as flesh congeals'. I discuss Plath's preferred interpretations of rebirth later in this chapter.

Because 'Poem for a Birthday' is of such significance in terms of the theme of rebirth, the greater part of my discussion centres on this sequence; it is important, however, that we appreciate Plath's use of this theme throughout her work, as I illustrate in the next section.

The Years to 'Poem for a Birthday'

Throughout this chapter, I have suggested that Plath's preoccupation with rebirth predates both her meeting with Hughes and her pregnancy; it permeates all her writings. Plath notes in her journal that in July 1958, it was 'as if I had to plunge to the bottom of nonexistence, of absolute fear, before I can rise again.' (*Journals*, p. 250) At the end of 'Family Reunion' (*Poems*, p. 300), the I-speaker dives into her own unconscious, she makes 'the fatal plunge' and this metaphor is repeated in *The Bell Jar*:

> I plummeted down past the zigzaggers, the students, the experts, through year after year of doubleness and smiles and compromise, into my own past. (*Bell*, p. 102)

It is informative in terms of Plath's thematic development to contrast the closure of 'Family Reunion' where 'the fatal plunge' is an ending, a 'death', with a later poem 'Song for a Revolutionary Love' (*Poems*, p. 322) in which renewal is implied:

Then hurl the bare world like a bluegreen ball
 back into the holocaust
 to burn away the humbug rust
and again together begin it all.

This offers the image of fire as a purifying agent. The 'revolution' of the title consists of a rejection of much of the accepted way of life: the 'good books' are to blow away, time is to be discounted, history--'antique samplers'--is to be unravelled, the dead to be released, all so that 'god hears from his great sunstruck hell/the chittering crackpots that he made.' Here too, is defamiliarisation: the sun becomes the source of the fires of hell wherein is to be found not the devil but 'god'. It is 'as if the usual order of the world had shifted slightly, and entered a new phase' (*Bell*, p. 252), Esther's comment on a flooded landscape. In the second stanza Plath offers a critique of patriarchal society:

Undo the doings of the fathering age:
 chuck the broken acropolis out,
 fling the seven wonders after that
with struts and props of the holy stage.

Rather than a personal rebirth, this appears to be a global rebirth. In 'Mayflower' (*Poems*, p. 60) the prerequisites for such personal rebirth are detailed:

Throughout black winter the red haws withstood
Assault of snow-flawed winds from the dour skies
And, bright as blood-drops, proved no brave branch dies
If root's firm-fixed and resolution good.

Both a physical and mental approach are needed. As she does in other poems, Plath here uses the physical landscape as a representation of the psychic landscape. We can perhaps begin to understand some of the difficulties involved in the process of

individuation: it requires courage: 'brave'; physical strength: 'firm-fixed', and will-power: 'resolution.'

Earlier in this chapter, I noted the dimension of place as an aspect of transformation. During 1957 Plath wrote 'The Great Carbuncle' (*Poems*, p. 72), of which Hughes comments that this was a description of:

> an odd phenomenon sometimes observed on high moorland for half an hour or so at evening, when the hands and faces of people seem to become luminous. (*Poems*, p. 276)

The transformation in this poem is of a physical nature, but if we consider certain of Plath's poems as psychic landscapes, then such transformation becomes a metaphor for a psychically altered state. Plath extends the phenomenon:

> Valleys of grass altering
> In a light neither of dawn
>
> Nor nightfall, our hands, faces
> Lucent as porcelain, the earth's
> Claim and weight gone out of them.

The transformation is revealed:

> The once-known way becoming
> Wholly other, and ourselves
> Estranged, changed, suspended where
> Angels are rumored, clearly
>
> Floating, among the floating
> Tables and chairs. Gravity's
> Lost in the lift and drift of
> An easier element
> Than earth, and there is nothing
>
> So fine we cannot do it.

The physical experience becomes spiritual. Because the physical body undergoes a change, this change is reflected in the mind; because the body is no longer tied to the earth, neither is the

mind; there is almost an hallucinatory quality in these lines, supported by the phrase 'floating/Tables and chairs.' The contrast of floating angels and floating tables and chairs suggests the contrast of aerial and earthly. As a psychic landscape, this image introduces a practical, ordinary aspect representing the 'meat-and-potato thoughts' ('The Ghost's Leavetaking', *Poems*, p. 90) in contrast with the possibilities of the spiralling air, 'the nimbus/Of ambrosial revelation.' (*ibid.*)

> Light withdraws. Chairs, tables drop
> Down: the body weighs like stone.

The furniture is a metaphor for the body itself, weighted to the earth. In the phrase 'light withdraws', Plath is perhaps implying a return to an inner darkness which had been lightened for a time.

> . . . and it begins to look like snow. The good gray conservative obliterating snow. Smoothing (in one white lacy euphemism after another) out all the black bleak angular unangelic nauseous ugliness of the blasted sterile world: dry buds, shrunken stone houses, dead vertical moving people all all all go under the great white beguiling wave. And come out transformed. Lose yourself in a numb dumb snow-daubed lattice of crystal and come out pure with the white virginal veneer you never had. (*Journals*, p. 72)

As the light transforms in the poem, so the snow transforms in the prose; it is an outside agent which effects the change. If we interpret the landscape as a mindscape, then an outer event or experience causes the inner alteration. The elements in this journal entry, 'dry buds', 'shrunken stone houses', 'dead vertical moving people', are all representations of aspects of the self, but they are changed by the snow. Plath perceives the

transformation process as a cleansing and purifying of the body: 'the white virginal veneer'. We know from her journal that she considered herself as ugly at certain times in her life, she perceived her face as an 'ugly dead mask'. (*Journals*, p. 66) This was written in January 1953; Plath attempted suicide in August of that year. At this point she perceived the outer appearance as representative of the inner world. Hall notes that this self-perception of 'plainness' is not uncommon, and leads to a form 'of ritual withdrawal'. (Hall 1980, p. 34) 'Sick with conflict' is Plath's self-description at this time (*Journals*, p. 63). Yet she is aware of the possibility of a form of rebirth, indeed, she perceives herself as already having achieved this:

> You are twenty. You are not dead, although you were dead.
> The girl who died. And was resurrected. (*Journals*, p. 65)

Perhaps Plath perceived transformation of the body as a metaphor for the birth of the self, an inner transformation. Such an experience would be a part of Jung's *renovatio* form of rebirth.

I have already discussed 'Full Fathom Five' (*Poems*, p. 92) in previous chapters; it is a poem of considerable importance in relation to the theme of rebirth, the 'sea-change' of *The Tempest*, another example of the fourth of Jung's forms of rebirth. The I-speaker recognises that she wishes to undergo such a change:

> Father, this thick air is murderous.
> I would breathe water.

To be reborn, the I-speaker must explore her unconscious.

In 'Full Fathom Five', Plath is moving closer to an exploration of herself, rebirth in a personal sense. In 'The Eye-Mote' (*Poems*, p. 109) a sense of physical renewal is explored:

> What I want back is what I was
> Before the bed, before the knife,
> Before the brooch-pin and the salve
> Fixed me in this parenthesis;
> Horses fluent in the wind,
> A place, a time gone out of mind.

Rather than incarnation in another body, the I-speaker seeks to be as she was: 'she wanted to keep her inner poetic vision while remaining alive and whole in relation to the outside world.'[10] It is that which has occurred which has disoriented the I-speaker to the extent that she is blind 'to what will be and what was': both future and past are disturbing. 'I dream that I am Oedipus': her blindness takes on a broader aspect, a self-inflicted inner blindness, an unwillingness to 'see' that which the unconscious presents. We must remember that for Plath, the senses of sight and hearing are associated with rebirth.

> Loss of eyes becomes a metaphor for the dismembering of the self-image and subsequent loss of identity. (Wright 1984, p. 148)

The problem of identity, as I discussed in my introductory chapter, was one which troubled Plath: 'don't ask me who I am' (*Journals*, p. 69); she was also aware of the gradual development of this selfhood. 'My identity is shaping, forming itself' was her comment in February 1958. (*Journals*, p. 191) 'Poem for a Birthday' was written at the end of 1959, 'The Eye Mote' at the beginning of that year; it appears that Plath was exploring a loss of identity in the earlier poem, an identity which, by the

end of the year, was being re-created, as she had already noted in her journal.

The theme of loss of sight is repeated in 'Tongues of Stone' (*Dreams*, p. 257), written in 1955:

> At first they thought she would be blind in that eye. She had lain awake the night of her second birth into the world of flesh, talking to a nurse who was sitting up with her, turning her sightless face toward the gentle voice and saying over and over again, 'But I can't see, I can't see.' . . . And then the full realization of her doom began to come back to the girl from the final dark where she had sought to lose herself. (*Dreams*, p. 272)

This is the metaphor of outer blindness for the inner state.

This girl too is scarred:

> They had raised her like Lazarus from the mindless dead, corrupt already with the breath of the grave, sallow-skinned, with purple bruises swelling on her arms and thighs and a raw open scar on her cheek that distorted the left side of her face into a mass of browning scabs and yellow ooze so that she could not open her left eye. (*ibid.*)

The story of Lazarus obviously exercised a great effect on Plath:

> I feel like Lazarus: that story has such a fascination. Being dead I rose up again, and even resort to the mere sensation value of being suicidal, of getting so close, of coming out of the grave with the scars and the marring mark on my cheek . . . (*Journals*, p. 100)

This concept of outer scarring as metaphor for inner scarring occurs again in the poem 'The Ravaged Face' (*Poems*, p. 115) written in March 1959 after a session with Dr Beuscher, her psychiatrist. (*Journals*, p. 298) In this poem the I-speaker describes the grossly distorted face and body of an individual who is revealed as the I-speaker (Plath herself was facially scarred from her first suicide attempt: *Poems*, p. 289). Yet this

distortion is not only an overt scarring, it is caused by 'some unutterable chagrin', it is 'obscene, lugubrious.'

> Better the flat leer of the idiot,
> The stone face of the man who doesn't feel,
> The velvet dodges of the hypocrite . . .

The I-speaker appeals: 'O Oedipus. O Christ. You use me ill.' She addresses mythology and religion and finds no comfort in either; she sees them as the cause of her mental suffering.

'Electra on Azalea Path' (*Poems*, p. 116) was composed during the early part of 1959 and is an exploration of the father/daughter relationship. The I-speaker realises that she has lived in a state of suspended animation from the time of her father's death, it was as if 'you had never existed, as if I came/God-fathered into the world from my mother's belly'. She views the intervening years as a golden age, 'I had nothing to do with guilt':

> Small as a doll in my dress of innocence
> I lay dreaming your epic, image by image.
> Nobody died or withered on that stage.

But on the day she finds her father's grave she can no longer deny his death and paradoxically, his existence. Plath noted of her own experience:

> I found the flat stone, "Otto E. Plath: 1885-1940," right beside the path, where it would be walked over. Felt cheated. My temptation to dig him up. To prove he existed and really was dead. (*Journals*, p. 298)

The I-speaker in the poem equates love and death 'I brought my love to bear, and then you died.' The 'birth' of love for her father killed him. 'It was my love that did us both to death':

for her father this was an actual death, for herself, a metaphorical death.

> What good does talking about my father do? It may be a minor catharsis that lasts a day or two, but I don't get insight talking to myself. What insight am I trying to get to free what? (*Journals*, p. 299)

It is surely significant that Plath wrote of her need for insight shortly before she completed 'Electra on Azalea Path', a poem in which the I-speaker has come to an understanding of herself and her relationship with her father: she is no longer in that 'lightless hibernaculum', no longer blind, she has inner sight.

During these years Plath was exploring different forms of rebirth, and while she does not reject any of the forms, her preferred interpretations are those of resurrection and *renovatio*, the third and fourth of the Jungian definitions. It is the final poem of the long closing sequence of *The Colossus* which explores *renovatio* and in which Plath becomes aware of the possibility of the birth of her self, a need she had noted in 1958:

> I must not be selfless: develop a sense of self. A solidness that can't be attacked. (*Journals*, p. 278)

'Poem for a Birthday'

At the end of 1959, Plath and Hughes were at the writers' colony at Yaddo, she was pregnant with her first child and had been reading Roethke's Greenhouse poems: from these three experiences

came 'Poem for a Birthday' (*Poems*, p. 131), the most significant of the poems in *The Colossus* in terms of the theme of rebirth.

> The creative process has feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths--we might say, from the realm of the mothers. (Jung 1941, pp. 196-197)

Plath commented:

> Drew a surgical picture of the greenhouse stove yesterday and a few flowerpots. An amazing consolation. Must get more intimate with it. That greenhouse is a mine of subjects. Watering cans, gourds and squashes and pumpkins. Beheaded cabbages inverted from the rafters, wormy purple outer leaves. Tools: rakes, hoes, brooms, shovels. The superb identity, self-hood of things. (*Journals*, p. 323)

The greenhouse contains images of life and death, but perhaps the most forceful image is that of the cycle of life, death and rebirth. On 23 October she wrote of the sequence 'Poem for a Birthday':

> Yesterday: an exercise begun, in grimness, turning into a fine, new thing: first of a series of madhouse poems. October in the toolshed. Roethke's influence, yet mine. (*Journals*, p. 323)

Part of the significance of this influence is that she gained 'a crucial grasp of what Roethke had achieved in metaphor, and of the possibilities of constructing poems solely out of metaphor.' (Homberger 1977, p. 155) By 4 November, the sequence was complete, seven poems exploring certain biographical incidents, such exploration extended to their psychological meaning.

In the title, 'Poem for a Birthday', Plath's use of the indefinite article widens the applicability of the sequence: it is not necessarily her own birthday to which she refers, although

we know that October was her birthday month; if it is her own birthday, then it may not be that particular one in 1959.

1 'Who'

The title of this first poem is somewhat ambiguous: there is no question mark, and the title becomes an introduction to the I-speaker, who is 'all mouth', who can 'sit in a flowerpot', who is 'a root, a stone, an owl pellet': the stress is on the insignificance of the speaker, even the 'spiders won't notice.' At the same time, Plath is expressing Jung's feminine principle, here interpreted by another woman:

> The elementary, static aspect of the feminine principle is represented as a receptive, dark, ingoing, moist enclosing and containing world of formation . . . Like the vibrant and fertile darkness of nature that ever renews organisms with new life, this elementary aspect of the feminine gestates new drives, images, fantasies and intuitions and is thus associated with the unconscious . . . [This is the] quality of the feminine which predominates in motherhood. (Ulanov 1971, pp. 157-8)

Positive expression of this aspect is shown in symbols such as the depths, fruit with an abundance of seeds, the belly; representative animal symbols include 'the pig, because of its fertility . . . and the owl with its uterine-shaped body.' (Ulanov 1971, p 158) I have already suggested that one of Plath's interpretations of stone is that of the organic nadir, a base from which to grow. In the poem the I-speaker sees herself as reduced in size, yet containing all life. 'Mother, you are the one mouth/I would be a tongue to.' We should perhaps consider this as not merely an address to the I-speaker's own

mother but rather that she is looking to the Universal or Great Mother, and towards the universal meaning of motherhood.

In this first poem the I-speaker stresses both the positive and negative sides of the elementary aspect of the feminine principle. Plath's skill with imagery is in her siting of the poem in a shed--perhaps a metaphor for the womb itself--a place where the I-speaker feels at home amongst dead flowerheads, a possible representation of lost opportunities. The dead and the living are linked, the heart is 'a stopped geranium': like the geranium, it will beat again in the right season. 'Cabbageheads' which are 'green-hearted' create a sense of the renewal carried within, a renewal which is linked to resurrection by the line: 'Nailed to the rafters'. Life-in-death is implied by the dead flowerheads which contain the seed for regrowth, for rebirth, and by inverting the flowerheads--they 'bloom upside down'--the I-speaker is suggesting the need to consider aspects of living in this slant fashion. 'Moldering heads console me', the I-speaker finds consolation in death-in-life which in turn has its own glory, 'the beauty of usage!'

Plath considered her electro-convulsive therapy was a prelude to her own rebirth:

> I thought about the shock treatment description last night: the deadly sleep of her madness, and the breakfast not coming, the little details, the flashback to the shock treatment that went wrong: electrocution brought in, and the inevitable going down the subterranean hall, waking to a new world, with no name, being born again, and not of woman. (*Journals*, p. 113)

Reborn, Plath sees herself as unencumbered by human attachments, unidentified, belonging only to herself. By being unnamed, is Plath perceiving herself as apart from the world? It is interesting that she should be re-considering this treatment after her first meeting with Hughes, particularly in view of the poem 'Love Letter' (*Poems*, p. 147) with its opening lines:

> Not easy to state the change you made.
> If I'm alive now, then I was dead . . .

At this point, Plath perceives her relationship with Hughes as some form of awakening or rebirth. In 'Who', she incorporates the treatment:

> Now they light me up like an electric bulb.
> For weeks I can remember nothing at all.

These are the final lines of a disturbing first poem which, through identification with the I-speaker, leave the reader uneasy, senses askew, and in darkness with memory obliterated.

2 'Dark House'

The title of this second poem recalls the 'shed' of the first poem; again, it is a metaphor for the womb, and is a personal creation by the I-speaker 'I made it myself'. The 'house' can be seen as a birthplace from which the I-speaker 'may litter puppies/Or mother a horse'; it is also possible to view it as the unconscious from which the new personality will emerge: it 'has so many cellars/Such eelish delvings'. We should note the contrast between the smallness of the I-speaker in the first poem and the largeness of the house in the second; by implication the womb, or the unconscious, is much bigger than the individual:

that which is unknown, invisible, is far greater than the known, the visible. As has been pointed out elsewhere, many of the more elusive images of this sequence appear to have been derived from Plath's reading of Radin's *African Folktales*;'' the lines:'All-mouth licks up the bushes/And the pots of meat' can be compared to the 'All-Devourer licked up the meat and the bushes with it' from 'Mantis and the All-Devourer'. (Radin 1965, p. 94) Anne Stevenson suggests that 'all-mouth' is 'taken from Jung' (Stevenson 1989, p. 169), although she does not specify the source.

The final two lines of 'Who' hinted at rebirth from a traumatic event; in the final stanza of the second poem the I-speaker sees the rebirth as a birth:

> Small nostrils are breathing.
> Little humble loves!
> Footlings, boneless as noses,
> It is warm and tolerable
> In the bowel of the root.
> Here's a cuddly mother.

The growing child within is a representation of her developing personality; Plath pointed out that her poems 'do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark.' (*Dreams*, p. 92) The universality of motherhood is suggested by the use of the indefinite article in the final line above.

In the search for her self Plath was exploring the four images of the feminine as presented by Jung and detailed by Ulanov (1971) pp. 194-211, images of the Mother, the Hetaira, the Amazon and

the Medial Woman, which I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to 'Three Women'. In that later poem, the images are easier to identify; in 'Poem for a Birthday', the Mother image predominates; one critic proposes that the poem 'traces the poet's search for a mother's love' (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 168), but if we use the Jungian definitions, then it is the poet coming to terms with the Mother within herself, which 'represents a collective orientation to people', a concern 'for those things which are undeveloped'. (Ulanov 1971, p. 198) We should note the reference to 'things' rather than 'children'. In Plath's case, the undeveloped 'things' are a combination of her own individuality, her self, and her poetic voice.

> It is a psychological fact that as soon as we touch on these identifications [of the mother-image] we enter the realm of the syzygies, the paired opposites, where the One is never separated the the Other, its antithesis. It is a field of personal experience which leads directly to the experience of individuation, the attainment of the self. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 106)

On this basis, we would expect that in 'Poem for a Birthday' the opposite of the Mother would be encountered, the Hetaira, a structure which 'produces the personality type that Jung calls the *puella aeterna*, the "father's daughter"'. (Ulanov 1971, p. 202) We can find evidence of this type in the third poem of the sequence.

3 'Maenad'

> Once I was ordinary:
> Sat by my father's bean tree
> Eating the fingers of wisdom.
> The birds made milk.
> When it thundered I hid under a flat stone.

The fourth line of this stanza is again a reference to a detail in 'The Bird That Made Milk' (Radin 1965, p. 146). It is possible that Plath interpreted this tale as evidence of the special relationship which exists between a father and his child or children.[12]

We do not have any published evidence that Plath knew of Jung's interpretation of the feminine; we know she read at least sections of *The Development of Personality* since she made notes on this, but such notes do not contain any references to the archetypes. Plath's notes are closely concerned with personality and her first quotation is profoundly significant:

> To develop one's own personality is indeed an unpopular undertaking, a deviation that is highly uncongenial to the herd, an eccentricity smelling of the cenobite, as it seems to the outsider.[13]

This suggests that individuation is not a process in which all can participate.

We should not expect all archetypal images such as those noted by Ulanov to appear in any particular poem or sequence.

> If a woman is aware of the archetypal dynamism underlying her own femininity, she knows more of herself. . . . She falls neither into the trap of thinking and acting as "just a housewife," or "only a career woman," etc., nor into the opposite horror of being unable to accept the pluralism of the contending forces within her . . . (Ulanov 1971, pp. 210-11)

In 'Poem for a Birthday' it appears that Plath is searching out her 'archetypal dynamism': the first two poems of the sequence look at the Mother image, the third at the Hetaira, the companion; but the I-speaker is aware of change, 'I am too big to

go backward', she cannot return to childhood, to the state of oneness with the universe which, for Plath, was broken by the birth of her brother. In the season of dying flora, a 'month fit for little' where the 'dead ripen in the grapeleaves', the I-speaker is altering, 'I am becoming another.' In the final verse paragraph there is again a change of direction as there has been in the other poems:

> Lady, who are these others in the moon's vat--
> Sleepdrunk, their limbs at odds?
> In this light the blood is black.
> Tell my name.

There are a number of significant images here: 'vat', a spatial image, suggesting, as did the 'shed' and 'house' of the earlier poems, the womb. Within this 'vat' appears the non-living, either asleep, or drunk, 'dead', with limbs contorted as in violent death. The third line could be contradictory, since light should reveal the colour of blood, but in the moon's light, all colour disappears and hence all life. The I-speaker addresses the Great Mother: the 'cuddly mother' of 'Dark House' has become 'Lady', an address which opens the poem 'Leaving Early' (*Poems*, p. 145); when Plath reads this slightly later poem, the term is clearly not one of affection, rather it is one of scorn. (*Sylvia Plath reading her poetry*) It is to this individual that the I-speaker turns in her search for her identity.

4 'The Beast'

Of the entire sequence, this fourth poem is probably the most difficult to interpret. For Kroll, placing this poem in her thesis of Plath's mythic system, 'it expresses the dying god and mourning goddess motif, contrasting an initially idyllic past with a present fall from grace' (Kroll 1978, p. 97). As Lane notes, Kroll attempts to fit all Plath's poems into a single framework which can only cover some of the work. (Lane 1979, p. x) In the first verse paragraph there are references to a godlike figure, an archetypal father, a 'bullman' who was 'King of the dish' and greater than the sun which 'sat in his armpit' a phrase taken from 'The Sun and the Children' (Radin 1965, p. 42). This figure is all-powerful:

> Nothing went moldy. The little invisibles
> Waited on him hand and foot.

But he is also earthbound, for he 'kept blowing me kisses'. Sorrowfully, the I-speaker feels she 'hardly knew him.' This all-pervasive creature cannot be avoided, he is within all that is deepest and most hidden; there is no escape from him, call him any name, 'he'll come to it.' Hughes suggests that the process of gestation/regeneration should be seen

> as a hermetically sealed, slow transformation of her inner crisis. . . . a deeply secluded mythic and symbolic inner theater (sometimes a hospital theater), accessible to her only in her poetry'.[14]

This poem becomes part of an exploration of the *animus*, an attempt by Plath to integrate her perception of the male within her in order to become whole.

> To achieve wholeness, people need the perspective of the anima or animus in the same way that they need the shadow. Integration of the contrasexual image expands and broadens the personality, giving it access to qualities thought to belong to the other sex. (Wehr 1988, p. 63)

In this poem the *animus* is first perceived as godlike but distant from the I-speaker, subsequently as existing within. The integration of the *animus* is suggested by the line 'I've married a cupboard of rubbish': at this point the *animus* is perceived in negative terms.

That this whole sequence is an interior journey is stressed in the final verse paragraph of this poem: the I-speaker is deep within herself. 'Down here the sky is always falling' creates a sense of being pressed down, perhaps into

> . . . Time's gut-end
> Among emmets and mollusks . . .

This final verse paragraph presents the I-speaker's self-perceptions; she defines herself in terms of a role, as wife, housekeeper, bride, and, as in earlier poems in this sequence, insignificant, 'Duchess of Nothing'.

5 'Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond'

The fifth poem suggests water as representative of the unconscious. The title recalls the quotation from the second chapter of the Book of Jonah, verses 5 and 6:

> The waters compassed me about, *even* to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.
>
> I went down to the bottoms of the mountains: the earth with her bars *was* about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.

Bodkin comments on the coming together of the wonder-tale and the psalm of spiritual confession in this passage (Bodkin 1934, p. 53); we should note Jonah's descent into his unconscious as a descent into water. In the opening lines of the Plath poem, to whom does the 'our' refer?

> Now coldness comes sifting down, layer after layer,
> To our bower at the lily root.

Is the I-speaker recognising that each human being is not a single 'I' but a plurality of 'I's', an essential part of the process of individuation which 'consists in coming to know the multiple personalities, the "little people" who dwell within one's breast'? (Wehr 1988, p. 54) Perhaps we should consider that the 'little people' are the little 'humble loves' of 'Dark House'. In that poem the sky was falling; in this poem in the depths of the pond 'the eye of the sky enlarges its blank/Dominion', an impression that the I-speaker is looking up from the bottom through the water, and this prefigures the later lines in the poem 'Words' (*Poems*, p. 270)

> From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars
> Govern a life.

'Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond' represents the 'death' of the old personality, and the period of quietness before rebirth, indicated by the emphasis on the slowness of life, the 'liquor of indolence', the 'soft caul of forgetfulness', the caddis worms which 'drowse in their silk cases', the insects 'nodding to sleep like statues.' But 'this is not death, it is something safer': the I-speaker considers that there is a state which is preferable

to death, that of suspended animation, the time immediately before rebirth:

> Before any period of creative awakening, there is . . . an incubation period that feels gray, motionless and utterly without passion. There is no horizon, no promise of its ending. (Hall 1980, p. 79)

The I-speaker has lost her identity as an individual, and has become a part of the wider natural world. This desire

> to be relieved of the burden of striving; even to die, and thus be reunited with the stuff of the universe from which one sprang are universal, if regressive, longings. . . . (Storr 1972, p. 181)

Possibly Plath is attempting to express this desire and to universalise her experience.

The final stanza points to the rebirth:

> The molts are tongueless that sang from above the water
> Of golgotha at the tip of a reed,
> And how a god flimsy as a baby's finger
> Shall unhusk himself and steer into the air.

The word 'unhusk' creates a visual image, a sense of a falling away of that which is outworn, outgrown; this is a 'pointer' towards birth and rebirth, and recalls Plath's comment that her poems are 'about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark' (*Dreams*, p. 92). Her poems are about creation.

6 'Witch Burning'

'Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond' stressed water as the unconscious, as the medium within which the new self develops; in the sixth poem of the sequence purification by fire is stressed. The I-speaker is not within her physical body, she inhabits the 'wax image' of herself, 'a doll's body', she sees herself as

small for if 'I am a little one, I can do no harm'; she also sees that body as subject to attacks from outside, 'a dartboard for witches'. By her use of imagery of vessels such as 'cellar' and 'belly': 'the containing world' (Ulanov 1971, p. 157), Plath is demonstrating the Jungian feminine principle which predominates in motherhood. (Ulanov 1971, pp. 157-158) The line: 'A black-sharded lady keeps me in a parrot cage' merits close examination: a shard is a beetle's wing case; the imprisoning female is perceived as small, black, insect-like. The I-speaker is to be caged, a function of the negative expression of the elementary aspect of the feminine, 'described symbolically as ensnaring, fixating' (Ulanov 1971, p. 158). Significantly, the cage is that of a parrot, a bird renowned for the beauty of its plumage, and for its ability to mimic the human voice; it is incapable of original speech. If this is the I-speaker's perception of herself, a brilliant exterior, but empty within, it is in contrast with Plath's own perception of herself as 'ugly' already noted.

'What large eyes the dead have' recalls the nursery rhyme 'Little Red Riding Hood' with its image of the devouring female; it may also be a reference to the 'eye of the dead giant' from 'The Origin of Death' (Radin 1965, p. 6). In the use of 'we' is a recognition of the plurality of the self, but also the universality of this growth experience. 'It hurts at first' has a prose parallel:

> . . . I am making a self, in great pain, often, as for a birth, but it is right that it should be so, and I am being refined in the fires of pain and love. (*Letters*, p. 223)

This offers an explanation of the baptism of fire, it is a refining process. It also points to Plath's own early awareness of rebirth: the letter was written in 1956. The movement of the poem is from the dark to the light, symbolising the positive expression of the elementary aspect of the feminine; we are offered the negative expression in the images of devouring, while the witch is the negative representation of the Hetaira. (Ulanov 1971, pp. 158 and 204)

In the final stanza, the line 'Mother of beetles' links back to the 'black-sharded lady' of the second stanza: the I-speaker is still caged and small, but the enclosing hand is to be unclenched, the freed individual will 'fly through the candle's mouth like a singeless moth': the I-speaker who inhabited the doll's body earlier in the poem has become like a creature of the air and the night, but unlike a true moth which will die in the flame of the candle, she will transcend the fire. She commands that her shape, her body, be returned to her, symbolising her return to 'life':

> Give me back my shape. I am ready to construe the days
> I coupled with dust in the shadow of a stone.
> My ankles brighten. Brightness ascends my thighs.
> I am lost, I am lost, in the robes of all this light.

This is a baptism of fire which hints at a 'death' of part of the self, possibly the death of the ego, which I have already discussed. In the first stanza the I-speaker could not hide in the darkness, a thicket of shadows was 'a poor coat'; in the last stanza she is preparing to appear as an imago.

7 'The Stones'

I have already discussed the final poem of the sequence in Chapter Three, but there are a few further points to be made. As the introduction to a reading of this poem, Plath describes the speaker as someone who has:

> utterly lost her sense of identity and relationship to the world. She imagines herself quite graphically undergoing the process of rebirth like a statue that has been scattered and ground down, only to be resurrected and pieced together centuries later. Gradually she accepts the frightening yet necessary ties of love which will heal and return her whole again to the world. (*The Living Poet: Sylvia Plath*)

This passage makes quite clear the focus of the poem, that of rebirth; the use of the future tense of the verbs rather than the present: 'will heal' and in the poem, 'I shall be good as new' implies the actual rebirth is yet to occur. The poem is an exploration of the imaginary event. I have suggested that this whole sequence should be considered as the 'conception' of the new self, rather than the 'birth' as Hughes suggests:

> In its double focus, "The Stones" is both a "birth" and a "rebirth." It is the birth of her real poetic voice, but it is the rebirth of herself.[15]

In connection with the theme of rebirth there are certain significant lines. 'I lie on a great anvil.' This implies that the I-speaker is to be reformed; Jung notes of consciousness and unconsciousness that they are 'the old play of hammer and anvil: the suffering iron between them will in the end be shaped into an unbreakable whole, the individual.' (Jung 1940, p. 27) The word 'suffering' provides a link with Plath's use of the hospital environment.

'Sponges kiss my lichens away' not only has a connection with an operating theatre, but also with the description of the soul in Plato in which it was likened to the sea-god Glaucus whose 'natural members' were damaged by the sea 'and incrustations had grown over them of seaweed and shells and stones . . . (*The Republic*, 611c and d, Plato [trans. Jowett] p. 488) In the hospital theatre, Plath's inner psychic theatre, the self will be found. Images of devouring, which can be seen as a prelude to rebirth, permeate this particular poem:

> In symbolic language, being devoured represents a kind of descent into the underworld, a sinking back into the womb, resulting in the extinction of consciousness, the death of the ego. (Jacobi 1959, p. 155

I have already discussed the death of the ego from a feminist viewpoint.[16]

The opening of the second part of the poem parallels the opening lines, but the 'city' is contrasted with 'after-hell': for the I-speaker the hell has been the darkness and the nothing through which she has passed in order to be reborn. As with a new-born baby, the world is explored through the senses. Plath's 'gift for evoking sound, touch, taste, as well as visual sensations, is vigorous';[17] in this poem there is the sound of the wind, the taste of water, the vision of light, the touch of heat. In the previous chapter I suggested that, in terms of rebirth, Plath refined this to only two senses, those of sight and hearing as in 'Suicide Off Egg Rock'.

We should remember that Plath considered her own electro-convulsive therapy as a prelude to rebirth (see the passage from the *Journals* quoted in the section on 'Who'); she incorporates such treatment into the poem:

> The grafters are cheerful,
>
> Heating the pincers, hoisting the delicate hammers.
> A current agitates the wires
> Volt upon volt . . .

I have already commented on the numerous references to vessels in this sequence, linking them through Ulanov's work with the feminine principle. There is one further comment from Ulanov on the use of spatial metaphor which is relevant:

> The feminine symbolism of the vessel at its highest level is the vessel of spiritual transformation--the Grail, the cup of the Last Supper. (Ulanov 1971, p. 190)

Plath's many references to a vessel--in this poem, a 'stomach', 'cupboard', 'chamber', 'storerooms', 'vase' and 'bowl'--are all concerned with spiritual transformation, not bodily transformation. Jung notes that the 'ark . . ., chest, casket, barrel, ship, etc. is an analogy of the womb, like the sea into which the sun sinks for rebirth.' (Jung 5, p. 211)

I have attempted to show in this analysis the great significance of the whole sequence, 'Poem for a Birthday' in which she 'uses elements from her experience as the starting point for imagistic and thematic elaborations.' (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 15) Many of the incidents used in the sequence relate to events in Plath's life, many of the phrases suggest the influence of other writers she had read; she uses such experiences to create a series of

poems which explore her childhood, her relationship with her father, and her breakdown. That Plath considered the sequence significant is demonstrated by the placing of it as the final section of *The Colossus*: she knew that in this sequence some difference was apparent:

> I wonder about the poems I am doing. They seem moving, interesting, but I wonder how deep they are. The absence of a tightly reasoned and rhythmed logic bother me. Yet frees me . . . (*Journals*, p. 324)

Aird has commented that part of the significance of 'Poem for a Birthday' lies in that in this sequence:

> private experience - breakdown and the reasons for it, clinical treatment, pregnancy - is extended through the images which accumulate layer upon layer until it becomes a metaphor for suffering throughout the natural and the human world. (Aird 1979, p. 68)

Plath succeeds in universalising her experience.

I suggested earlier that Plath was exploring the four female archetypes of Mother, Hetaira, Amazon and Medium. Inevitably in her career of writer, the predominant archetype is the Medium, 'an agent, a mediator, a means, not an end. . . . She mediates the deep abysses of the feminine, in an individual, subjective way, to those around her.' (Ulanov 1971, p. 208) I have already identified the Mother and the Hetaira; identifying the Amazon is more difficult, as it was for 'Three Women' and an explanation can be found:

> Experience shows that it is practically impossible, owing to adverse circumstances in general, for anyone to develop all his psychological functions simultaneously. . . . Very frequently, indeed as a general rule, a man identifies more or less completely with the most favoured and hence the most developed function. . . . As a consequence of this one-sided development, one or more functions are necessarily retarded. (Jung 6, p. 450)

Wehr (1988, p. 114) elaborates this from the female viewpoint:

> As in Jung's typology where, for example, thinking and feeling are opposed, "Mother" and "Hetaira" are opposed, as are "Medium" and "Amazon." This opposition means that one cannot be . . . both a medium (a woman "tuned-in" to the surrounding collective unconscious) and an amazon (an independent woman) simultaneously.'[8]

'Miraculously I wrote seven poems in my Poem for a Birthday sequence' (*Journals*, p. 325). At this point Plath was aware of the 'conception' of the self; the gestation period was to last over much of the remaining years of her life.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to consider the development of the theme of rebirth in Plath's early work and in the years in which she wrote the poems of *The Colossus*, which culminated in 'Poem for a Birthday', a sequence showing her awareness of the conception of the self, the whole personality. Plath was pregnant with her first child at the time of writing this sequence, and we know from the *Journals* that she equated the writing of poetry with motherhood:

> I have two university degrees and now will turn to my own profession and devote a year to steady apprenticehip, and to the symbolic counterpart, our children. Sometimes I shiver in a preview of the pain and the terror of childbirth, but it will come and I live through it. (*Journals*, p. 195)

It is important to take account of the context of 'Poem for a Birthday', Plath's pregnancy, which was, for her, a longed-for state. In March of 1959 she had believed herself with child:

> Pregnant I thought. Not, such luck. After a long 40 day period of hope, the old blood cramps and spilt fertility. I

> had lulled myself into a fattening calm and this was a blow . . . (*Journals*, p. 298)

Pregnancy is a state which involves not only physical changes but also psychological changes. The woman has to adjust to being the nurturing vessel, to being a part of creation, she has to come to terms with the needs of the developing child as being of such paramount importance that her own needs take second place. In the early stages it is perhaps difficult to imagine that one has become two, but once the pregnancy is visible that which was an idea becomes an observable fact and the woman is aware of the continuity between past and future. Pregnancy can be viewed as starting afresh, it is a transforming experience: not only is it a physical transformation, it is also a role transformation: the woman, through her child, can perceive her own place in the world:

> to become a mother is to replace one's own mother, to assume responsibility for the next generation, to accept the inescapable chain of life and death. (Yalom 1985, p. 108)

In terms of the process of individuation, we can perhaps consider that in replacing her own mother, Plath was liberating herself from Aurelia Plath's influence. Her mother represented 'the childhood symbol of security and rightness' (*Journals*, p. 14), and in replacing her, she would feel the need to become such a symbol for her own child. This transforming nature of pregnancy explains a part of Plath's concern with the process of individuation: self-transformation was 'an overall intention in Plath's life and work.' (Bundtzen 1983, p. 35)

I have suggested that Plath is exploring her personal process of individuation through her poetry, and have already noted the difficulties involved in that process, difficulties of which Plath was herself aware. An added difficulty may have been the subject matter of the poems on maternity:

> The value of Plath's poems on motherhood lies in their exploration of a relatively uncharted area of experience. The cluster of maternal feelings surrounding the birth of a child has never been adequately described, and traditional attitudes do not serve. . . . Plath writes with an awareness of her own inadequacies as a mother and a sense of the difficulties of nurturing another human being; but she is also aware of the inadequacies of the world. . . . If she verges on private and taboo areas, she also is concerned with universal questions about creation and nurture. (Uroff 1973, pp. 89-90)

Plath's concerns expand from the creation of a child to the creation of her self as expressed in the creation of her poetry.

SIX

THE THEME OF REBIRTH II

Introduction

It will have been observed that for ease of study, I have divided Plath's *oeuvre* because the subject of rebirth is of such magnitude and significance; in the previous chapter I considered the sequence, 'Poem for a Birthday' from *The Colossus* as the focus of that chapter and I also considered certain of the stages involved in the process of individuation. I do not wish to suggest that these stages can be traced only in the earlier work, since it is clear that any discussion of the process of individuation and the rebirth archetype is relevant to all aspects of Plath's work. As I have indicated, I believe 'Poem for a Birthday' should be viewed as an awareness of the 'conception' of the new self, and the series of bee poems as the 'birth' of that self, the rebirth of the personality which is the final aspect of individuation, and on which I concentrate my discussion throughout this chapter. The focus of this chapter is the sequence of bee poems from *Ariel*; I also examine Jung's symbols of transformation, because these are of interest in connection with Plath's later work, and I trace the various stages of such symbols through her poetry. I return to Jung's symbolism in the concluding chapter.

I have already discussed a number of the final group of poems in earlier chapters; in the section relating to them in this

chapter, I am particularly concerned with their relevance to the birth of the personality, and Plath's exploration of her emotions in connection with this.

The Process of Individuation 2

I noted in the previous chapter that the coming to terms with and freeing oneself from the influence of the mother is one stage in the process of individuation. (Jacobi 1943, p 115) Jung commented that the mother is often representative of the past (Jung 1940, p. 44), and we can see this stage as an acceptance and integration of past events leading to personal growth. In Plath's work we should not confuse the mother of the poems and of the novel with Plath's real mother, rather it is the archetypal image that is being confronted, the past as represented by the parental figure. An early poem in which the I-speaker confronts the mother figure is 'The Disquieting Muses' (*Poems*, p. 74), one of a series written on paintings by de Chirico: in this instance, the poem and the painting bear the same title. In the poem, the I-speaker accuses the mother of allowing these figures with 'heads like darning-eggs' to be 'at the left side' of the crib: we should remember that the left side is the 'sinister' side. Incidents from the I-speaker's childhood are incorporated: the witches that were 'baked into gingerbread', the incantation at the thunder.

> I woke one day to see you, mother,
> Floating above me in bluest air
> On a green balloon bright with a million

> Flowers and bluebirds that never were
> Never, never, found anywhere.
> But the little planet bobbed away
> Like a soap-bubble as you called: Come here!
> And I faced my traveling companions.

The I-speaker has come to understand the world of make-believe the mother created, she understands that much of what she believed as a child is no longer relevant to the self of today: she is now ready to face the present.[1] Similarly, the past is put away and the I-speaker enabled to grow in 'Maenad' (*Poems*, p. 133), in which the mother is told to 'keep out of my barnyard,/I am becoming another': again, the past is put away and the I-speaker is enabled to grow.

> Plath's depiction of her mother and other female characters may trouble the reader who knows her biography, but *The Bell Jar* is a fiction, and in fiction real people are transformed. (Wagner-Martin, 1988, p. 190)

In *The Bell Jar* Plath attempts to come to terms with the past and the relationship with her mother through Esther: in the novel, Esther encounters her feelings for her own mother.

The need to fictionalise the account of that part of her life which she was exploring was a method of distancing herself from painful events; in 'most of her poetry, Plath achieves distance from the personal experience by exploration of symbolic and mythical potentialities.'[2] In *The Bell Jar* Plath extends this distancing device by having Esther create her own fictional character, Elaine.

> *Elaine sat on the breezeway in an old yellow nightgown of her mother's, waiting for something to happen. It was a sweltering morning in July, and drops of sweat crawled down her back, one by one, like slow insects.* (*Bell*, p. 127)

Elaine is trying to become her mother, to become her own past. Later Esther confronts her feelings: she hates her mother (*Bell*, p. 215), she hates her past, but she comes to accept it, although such acceptance does not lead to the clarity which she had expected:

> I had hoped, at my departure, I would feel sure and knowledgeable about everything that lay ahead - after all, I had been 'analyzed'. Instead, all I could see were question marks. (*Bell*, p. 257)

The ending of the novel is intended to be positive:

> There ought, I thought, to be a ritual for being born twice - patched, retreaded and approved for the road. (*Bell*, p. 257)

Such a ritual Esther notes in the last lines of the book:

> The eyes and the faces all turned themselves towards me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room. (*Bell*, p. 258)

Esther is moving away from the hospital, the 'scene' of her new birth, away from past events to a new life; she steps into the room, a symbolic representation of stepping into a new body: she has been reborn.

I have already noted that in the process of individuation, rebirth is the inner transformation into another being:

> This "other being" is the other person in ourselves--that larger and greater personality maturing within us, whom we have already met as the inner friend of the soul . . . into whom Nature herself would like to change us--that other person who we also are and yet can never attain to completely. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 131)

This 'other' is the inner friend or foe: which it is depends on the individual; the 'other's' voice is heard as part of the dialogues that each individual has with her/himself. In her

study of 'The Ancient Mariner', Maud Bodkin has proposed a pattern for the rebirth archetype in literature:

> Within the image-sequences . . . the pattern appears of a movement, downward, or inward toward the earth's centre, or a cessation of movement--a physical change which, as we urge metaphor closer to the impalpable forces of life and soul, appears also as a transition toward severed relation with the outer world, and, it may be, toward disintegration and death. This element in the pattern is balanced by a movement upward and outward--an expansion or outburst of activity, a transition toward redintegration (*sic*) and life-renewal. (Bodkin 1934, p. 54)

If we consider the sequence of bee poems with which Plath closed her version of *Ariel* as an illustration of the rebirth archetype in literature, then we would expect to find this double movement, inward and outward, illustrated in that sequence.

The Colossus ends with the sequence 'Poem for a Birthday'; in Plath's own ordering (see Appendix 3), *Ariel* closes with the sequence of five bee poems, 'The Bee Meeting' (*Poems*, p. 211), 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' (*Poems*, p. 212), 'Stings' (*Poems*, p. 214), 'The Swarm' (*Poems*, p. 215) and 'Wintering' (*Poems*, p. 217). In the published version, 'The Swarm' was omitted from *Ariel* but included in *Winter Trees*. As already discussed, 'Poem for a Birthday' builds into an affirmation of the I-speaker's awareness of the 'conception' of her new self; the bee poems have a similar function but rather than the 'conception' of this self, the later sequence announces the actual 'birth'. This is in contrast to the suggestion made by Hughes and noted in the previous chapter, that 'The Stones' announced the new birth: 'that birth, which had seemed so complete in "The Stones," was dragging on. And it went on dragging on.'[3] He suggests that it

was not until the poems of September, October and November 1961 'that the newborn seems to feel the draft of the outer world.'[4] This is a year ahead of the composition of the bee poems; perhaps rather than the birth, if we stay within the pregnancy metaphor we should regard the poems of autumn 1961 as the start of 'labour', an inevitably painful process. It is interesting that from Jung Plath noted that there is 'no birth of consciousness without pain.'[5] When at Smith College she commented in her *Journals*:

> . . . I can see chinks of light: of a new life. Will there be pain? The birth-giving pain is not yet known. (*Journals*, p. 203)

The sequence of bee poems was composed in the order shown above, and from the dates given in *Collected Poems* was written over a very short period, from 3rd to 9th October 1962, an even shorter time scale than that in which 'Poem for a Birthday' was written. Copies of Plath's *Journals* for this late period were destroyed by Hughes, and therefore we have no record of her own thoughts at this time, but in a letter to her brother dated 12 October 1962, she commented that she was 'writing from dawn to when the babes wake, a poem a day, and they are terrific.' (*Letters*, p. 467) She also wrote to her mother on 16 October 1962 that the poems she was writing at that time 'will make my name.' (*Journals*, p. 355)

As I noted in my introductory chapter, Plath's own ordering of *Ariel* included the majority of the poems written after the bee sequence; 'Death & Co.' (*Poems*, p. 254) dated 14 November was the last to be included. All these later poems precede the bee poems

in her version, which emphasises the importance that Plath attached to this sequence as a concluding statement for the collection.

We know from biographical references of the importance of bees to Otto Plath;[6] his interest was in bumblebees, whereas that of his daughter was in honey bees. At the time that the bee sequence was written, Plath had recently separated from her husband; if we consider references to 'father' as being not necessarily of an autobiographical nature, but rather references to a male authority figure from which Plath sought to escape, then this series of poems is not only a metaphor for her own personal struggle, but also perhaps implying the female's need to emerge from beneath male domination; it is possible that Plath expresses this through her use of images of suffocation: for example, in 'Full Fathom Five' (*Poems*, p. 92) the 'thick air is murderous'; in 'The Ghost's Leavetaking' (*Poems*, p. 90) there is a 'thick atmosphere'. This inability to breathe is perhaps a symbolic representation of 'suffocation' by patriarchy; we should remember that Plath was afflicted by attacks of sinusitis for much of her life, as references throughout the *Letters* indicate. (*Letters*, pp. 52, 82, 90, 141, 217, 261, 285, 370) It was, perhaps, a physical manifestation of her 'fight for air and freedom' (*Letters*, p. 465).

Considerations of Rebirth 2

> Rebirth is an affirmation that must be counted among the primordial affirmations of mankind. These primordial affirmations are based on what I call archetypes. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 116)

The archetype can perhaps best be defined as a tendency to form images (Lauter & Rupprecht 1985, p. 14), the origin of which

> remains obscure, its nature unfathomable; for it dwells in that mysterious shadow realm, the collective unconscious, to which we shall never have direct access, and of whose existence and operation we can have only indirect knowledge, precisely through our encounter with the archetypes, i.e., their manifestations in the psyche. (Jacobi 1959, p. 32)

In his discussion of rebirth, Jung notes that there are two main groups of experience: 'that of the transcendence of life, and that of one's own transformation.' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 117) Under the heading of 'Experience of the Transcendence of Life', there are two types, firstly, experiences induced by ritual, wherein the individual recognises the continuation of life through transformation and renewal, and the example quoted is that of the Mass; and secondly, immediate experiences:

> All that the mystery drama represents and brings about in the spectator may also occur in the form of a spontaneous, ecstatic, or visionary experience, without any ritual. Nietzsche's Noontide Vision is a classic example of this kind. (Jung *ibid.* p. 118)

Under the heading of 'Subjective Transformation', there are eight types: diminution of personality, enlargement of personality, change of internal structure, identification with a group, identification with a cult-hero, magical procedures, technical transformation and natural transformation (individuation).[7]

Jung suggests that there are three different sets of transformation symbols: in the first stage are found animals such as the horse and the bull, together with diminutive insects of every kind. (Jung 1940, p. 93) This stage is also represented by the cellar and the cave; such symbolism is evident in 'Wintering' (*Poems*, p. 217):

> I have my honey,
> Six jars of it,
> Six cat's eyes in the wine cellar,
>
> Wintering in a dark without window
> At the heart of the house . . .

'Cave and sea refer to the unconscious state with its darkness and secrecy.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 94)

To the intermediate stage belong symbols such as the crossing, the dangerous passage, movement such as hanging, soaring or swimming, together with the tree which 'represents rootedness, repose, growth, and a spreading forth in the upper regions of air and light, as also the union of sky and earth.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 94) The agents of the initiation ceremony in 'The Bee Meeting' (*Poems*, p. 211) are at a bridge: 'Who are these people at the bridge to meet me?' questions the I-speaker. The ceremony itself takes place in a grove: 'They are leading me to the shorn grove, the circle of hives.' The grove contains a hawthorn, a tree long believed to be unlucky: it was used by the White Goddess for casting spells, and its blossom is believed to have 'a strong scent of female sexuality'. (Graves 1961, p. 176) Perhaps at this point the I-speaker perceived this as overpowering, 'Is it the hawthorn that smells so sick?' Possibly, she is afraid of

her own sexuality. Trees are also included in 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' (*Poems*, p. 212), the laburnum and the cherry. In 'The Swarm' (*Poems*, p. 215), a river has been crossed. Finally, in 'Wintering' (*Poems*, p. 217), the 'bees are flying'.

'To the end of the process belong all the symbols of the self in its various aspects', including the circle, the flower, especially the rose, the egg, the child. (Jung *ibid.* p. 94) In 'Stings' (*Poems*, p. 214), there are the lily, the cherry, and the clover, and in 'Wintering', Christmas roses.

The Years to the Bee Sequence

My intention is not to suggest that the 'pregnancy' announced in 'Poem for a Birthday' is uneventful and leads to a pain-free 'birth' in the bee sequence; there are 'false starts', 'labour pains'; if this were not so, then every poem written between the autumn of 1959 and the autumn of 1962 would fit neatly within the Jungian framework of the process of individuation. To endeavour to integrate all the poems into such a frame is to diminish Plath's work; however, there is a preoccupation with the theme of rebirth and there are a number of poems which demonstrate Plath's continuing growth through the 'pregnancy'.

A poem which brings together the theme of rebirth and the image of stone is 'Love Letter' (*Poems*, p. 147). At the opening of the poem the I-speaker is uncertain of the nature of the change taking place:

Not easy to state the change you made.
If I'm alive now, then I was dead,
Though, like a stone, unbothered by it . . .

This repeats one of Plath's uses of the stone as a representation of the state of non-feeling. '. . . it is so much safer *not* to feel, *not* to let the world touch one.' (*Journals*, p. 63) In the poem, this state is not one of death, although it may be like death:

. . . I slept, say: a snake
Masked among black rocks as a black rock
In the hiatus of winter--

Imagery of the serpent belongs to the first stage of the transformation process which I discussed in the previous section, and it, together with saurians and monsters, 'personify primordial, cold-bloooded animal nature' (Jung 1940, p 93): the I-speaker is reiterating her perception of herself as non-feeling. But this changes, and at this point in her life, the I-speaker believes this change to be due to the 'you' to whom the poem is addressed. 'I knew you at once', she says. We can only speculate that while the 'you' may be another person, possibly Hughes, it may also be the I-speaker addressing herself.

I started to bud like a March twig:
An arm and a leg, an arm, a leg.
From stone to cloud, so I ascended.
Now I resemble a sort of god
Floating through the air in my soul-shift
Pure as a pane of ice. It's a gift.

Images of the tree, and of soaring and swimming belong to the intermediate stage. At the end of the poem, there is no final transformation stage. This was written in October 1960, so we should perhaps regard it as part of the 'pregnancy', part of the

development of an awareness of the self. The final sentence merits attention: it could refer back to the I-speaker's resemblance to 'a sort of god'; it could refer to the 'gift' given by the addressee of the poem, it could refer to the I-speaker's ability to develop her personality. A 'gift' is freely presented, no penalty is to be exacted. It is for the reader to fit her/his own response to the phrase.

'Mirror' (*Poems*, p. 173) makes use of the concept that the soul is contained in an individual's 'reflection in water or a mirror.' (Frazer 1924, p. 192) We know that Plath read this particular chapter, since she wrote to her mother: 'Your book gift, *The Golden Bough* . . . has an excellent chapter on "the soul as shadow and reflection."' (*Letters*, p. 145)

> I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
> Whatever I see I swallow immediately
> Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

'A mirror has no depth in space or time: it is sheer surface. A lake looks to past and future and has dark depths like those of the unconscious mind . . . ' (Collecott 1986, p. 454)

> Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
> Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Watery depths belong to the first stage of transformation symbols. Part of the significance of this poem lies in the emphasis placed on truth: the mirror is 'not cruel, only truthful', and the I-speaker perceives 'those liars, the candles or the moon' as false illuminators of the self; this may represent a fear of that self, a fear of the unknown. In contrast, the mirror reflects her back 'faithfully': the mirror

as a representation of the soul or the unconscious offers the searcher a 'truth': 'I am important to her.' If we stay within the pregnancy metaphor, then this poem can be considered as a 'false start' to the birth:

> In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
> Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

The I-speaker, the mirror itself, 'sees' a future without hope, full of terror, the unconscious is not to be explored. At this point, the I-speaker is arrested at the first stage of the transformation process.[8]

In the poems written during 1962, Plath offers various comments on the process of individuation. In 'Daddy' (*Poems*, p. 222) the I-speaker is aware of the disintegration of her self at the time of her suicide attempt, 'I tried to die', but 'they stuck me together with glue'; this is the start of the process of rebirth. For Plath, 'the central experience of a shattering of the self, and the labour of fitting it together again or finding a new one' (Hughes 1966, p. 81), was an experience she shared with others such as Lowell and Sexton, and is an aspect which Adrienne Rich identifies as her own 'unconscious fragmentation of identity', which she relates to the predominant culture. (Rich 1986, p. 175)

In 'Fever 103°' (*Poems*, p. 231), images of soaring appear, which place the poem in the intermediate stage of transformation, and then the flower symbolism places it in the final stage:

> I think I am going up,
> I think I may rise--
> The beads of hot metal fly, and I, love, I

Am a pure acetylene
Virgin
Attended by roses . . .

In the following lines, the I-speaker perceives the plurality of the 'I', Wehr's 'multiple personalities' which I noted earlier (Wehr 1988, p. 54), and she perceives them as underwear, that is, as a support, whose purpose is the serving and pleasure of man. Since these selves are seen as 'dissolved', the I-speaker considers herself as freed from such a necessity.

(My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats)--
To Paradise.

The end of the transformation process is perceived as 'paradise' rather than 'heaven' which would imply death. Jung discusses paradise, noting the Christian connection, and linking the whole to individuation:

> Now, what is paradise? Clearly, the Garden of Eden with its twofold tree of life and of knowledge, and its four rivers. In the Christian version it is also the heavenly city of the Apocalypse, which, like the Garden of Eden, is conceived as a mandala. But the mandala is a symbol of individuation. (Jung 1940, p. 85)

We can perhaps consider Plath's use of 'paradise' implies recognition of the final stage of the transformation process.

The most significant poem of this period in relation to the theme of rebirth is also one of the most anthologised, 'Lady Lazarus' (*Poems*, p. 244), the Lazarus theme being one we know Plath found fascinating (*Journals*, p. 100). Of the poem, Plath said that the speaker

> is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the Phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is

also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman. (*Poems*, p. 294)

Plath sees this gift as being full of terror, and we gain a greater understanding of her use of the Holocaust imagery, an experience full of the greatest terror. The early part of the poem is a meditation on the I-speaker's previous lives: 'I am only thirty./And like the cat I have nine times to die'; these earlier 'deaths' have not altered her 'I am the same, identical woman.' Her comment that it's 'easy enough to do it in a cell' suggests the first stage of the transformation process; Jung notes that 'fire, weapons, and instruments' also belong to this stage. (Jung, 1940, p.93) Fire imagery appears in 'I turn and burn' and:

Ash, ash--
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there--

The final stanza is an interpretation of the phoenix myth:

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

The I-speaker has become free from the male influence: it is now she who dominates.

We can see that the majority of the poems written during 1962 contain references to the symbols of the various transformation stages; in addition to those already discussed, there are other examples, in 'Ariel', the horse belongs to the first stage; in 'Berck-Plage', the sea belongs to the intermediate stage; and in the child poems, the imagery belongs to the final stage of the transformation process. As would be expected, images of the

child increase in the poems after the bee sequence, culminating in 'Child', written in 1963, and which I discuss in the section, 'The Final Poems' in this chapter.

I have already suggested that the 'birth' was not without problems, 'false starts' and in certain poems, 'abortions'. In *The Bell Jar* there are 'images of decaying figs, dead babies, jarred foetuses, and other forms of aborted maternity'. (Yalom 1985, p. 14) In 'Stillborn' (*Poems*, p. 142) written during 1960, Plath uses imagery of the dead child to indicate 'dead' poems, poems which 'grew their toes and fingers well enough', which 'are proper in shape and number and every part', and which 'sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!' But despite their smiles, 'the lungs won't fill and the heart won't start.' The I-speaker mourns the state of the poems:

> It would be better if they were alive, and that's what they were.
> But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,
> And they stupidly stare, and do not speak of her.

We do not know to which poems this refers, possibly it is to unwritten or unpublished work, or it may be a meditation on poems which Plath considered unsuccessful. The image of a foetus in a jar occurs in 'A Life' (*Poems*, p. 150), as an analogy for the detached state of the woman in hospital who 'lives quietly//With no attachments, like a foetus in a bottle'. 'Parliament Hill Fields' (*Poems*, p. 152) is a meditation on miscarriage:

> Your absence is inconspicuous;
> Nobody can tell what I lack.

The final line, 'I enter the lit house' suggests rebirth for the I-speaker, the house as metaphor for the female body. This particular 'child' may have been aborted, but the I-speaker resumes her life, the 'old dregs, the old difficulties take me to wife.' It is interesting that the I-speaker perceives problems as male, a sense that she is in conflict with the masculine.

The sense of loss is echoed in 'Three Women' (*Poems*, p. 177); it is the Second Voice, that of the Secretary, who suffers the stillbirth of her child, for which she says 'I lose a dimension.' She declares 'I am found wanting' and that 'I make a death' but her final lines contain hope:

> . . . . The little grasses
> Crack through stone, and they are green with life.

Despite the miscarriage, other children will come. Other images of aborted maternity occur in 'Thalidomide' (*Poems*, p. 252), the 'half-brain' whose 'dark/Amputations crawl and appall', with knuckles 'at shoulder-blades' and faces 'that/Shove into being, dragging/The lopped/Blood-caul of absences.' The final lines are significant:

> The glass cracks across,
> The image
>
> Flees and aborts like dropped mercury.

The self is seen as deformed, disintegrating. The image of the mercury ball occurs in *The Bell Jar*:

> I opened my fingers a crack, like a child with a secret, and smiled at the silver globe cupped in my palm. If I dropped it, it would break into a million little replicas of itself, and if I pushed them near each other, they would fuse, without a crack, into one whole again. (*Bell*, p. 194)

Esther is in charge of her own fate.

Through these various images of pregnancy, Plath was exploring her own feelings towards children, towards her poetry; the two become entwined to the extent that we can no longer distinguish whether the child represents a human life or a poem. And is such a distinction of either use or importance? We need to recognise Plath's skill in the use of such metaphor in order to trace her development, her personal growth and ultimately the birth of her self, through her work. In 'Mystic' the I-speaker questions that once 'one has seen God, what is the remedy?' If Plath perceived this rebirth as 'perfection'--and for her, perfection was full of terror--we can understand the fear, the sense of threat which pervades some of the poems written early in 1963. She did not live long enough to find her remedy.

Plath wrote one poem about bees, 'The Beekeeper's Daughter' (*Poems*, p. 118), which she included in her first collection, *The Colossus*. My purpose in discussing the poem at this point is that it serves as an introduction to the sequence of bee poems in *Ariel*.

I have already noted Plath's use of the image of suffocation as a metaphor for emotions in relation to the male authority figure. In the bee poems in *Ariel*, the I-speaker progresses from enduring male dominance: 'the magician's girl' ('The Bee Meeting', the first poem of the sequence), to authority: 'I am in control'

('Stings', the third poem), and finally to possession: 'I have my honey', ('Wintering', the last poem); however, in the first bee poem, 'The Beekeeper's Daughter', the I-speaker is totally dominated by the male, she perceives herself only as role, daughter to the beekeeper. In 'Wintering' there is reference to 'the room I could never breathe in', the suffocation is confined, but in 'The Beekeeper's Daughter' this sense of near-asphyxiation is much wider: it is not merely a room, it is a garden wherein all the flowers, the 'great corollas' emit a musk which 'encroaches, circle after circle' creating an atmosphere, a 'well of scents almost too dense to breathe in.' It is interesting that Plath should associate essentially 'feminine' imagery, that of flowers, with this suffocation. Perhaps unconsciously, she was perceiving herself as 'suffocated' also by the women with whom she associated, her identity was threatened by both male and female. If we refer to the Jungian symbols of transformation, the circle and the flower both belong to the final stage of the transformation process. This, it would seem, gives an added significance to this poem as an introduction to the sequence which closes *Ariel*: we can perhaps regard it as not only introducing, but also prefiguring, the concerns and the imagery of those later poems. Consciously, the suffocation is associated with the male in the first bee poem, for immediately following the asphyxiating 'well of scents', we are introduced to the beekeeper:

> Hieratical in your frock coat, maestro of the bees,
> You move among the many-breasted hives,
>
> My heart under your foot, sister of a stone.

The hives are themselves perceived as women. The I-speaker considers herself as dominated by the male to the extent that she is down-trodden, and resembles nothing more than a stone on the ground, to be totally disregarded by the walker, the 'maestro of the bees'.

The I-speaker recognises the power of the queen bee, for here is 'a queenship no mother can contest', which implies a difference between the power of the queen bee and that of the mother and awards the queen the greater strength. This gives an illuminating perspective to the later sequence where the I-speaker perceives herself as the queen: in 'Stings', she has 'a self to recover, a queen'. In the early poem, Plath had not experienced motherhood; by the time she had written the longer sequence of poems, she had experienced giving birth twice, together with a miscarriage and the break-up of her marriage. She seems to be suggesting that there is a position of power for women unrelated to motherhood, or rather greater than motherhood; only having experienced the birth of children--and this can be used in a figurative as well as a literal sense--can a woman find her self, can then become the total personality which is the purpose of the process of individuation.[3]

The influence of Otto Plath is made explicit in the final stanza:

> In burrows narrow as a finger, solitary bees
> Keep house among the grasses. Kneeling down
> I set my eye to a hole-mouth and meet an eye
> Round, green, disconsolate as a tear.

These details are mentioned in his book *Bumblebees and Their Ways*, and had been demonstrated to Plath by him. (*Poems*, p. 289) In this final part of the poem, the I-speaker conflates father and husband, perhaps even God:

> Father, bridegroom, in this Easter egg
> Under the coronal of sugar roses
>
> The queen bee marries the winter of your year.

It is with the queen bee that power resides, for it is she who 'marries the winter of your year', suggesting that the male power is waning. The I-speaker in this poem is still under the dominance of the male authority figure and the earlier use of 'hieratical' indicates the ritualised nature of this figure.

> Individuals' anima or animus images are constructed, in part, on their experience of the opposite sex--especially in early life. The earlier the experience occurs, the more influence it has on the contrasexual image and the more likely that it will become part of the personal unconscious (rather than remaining conscious). (Wehr 1988, p. 63)

Jung's concept of the *animus* is 'the embodiment of the masculine element in a woman' (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 191).

The theme of the male/female power struggle is developed in the *Ariel* poems. In 'The Beekeeper's Daughter', the ritual element involved in beekeeping is explored; such ritual appears in 'The Bee Meeting' and becomes a metaphor for the I-speaker's rebirth. Of greater significance is the affirmation of the power of women, the power of the queen bee over the male drones, a power to which Graves attests when writing of the Gallic Heather-goddess Uroica who is 'a queen bee about whom male drones swarm in midsummer'. (Graves 1961, p. 192) However, Plath was not only asserting such

female power, she was also exploring the notion that the woman who finds her self, who participates in the process of individuation has an additional power even above other women, the 'honey-drudgers'.

The short story 'Charlie Pollard and the Beekeepers' (*Dreams*, p. 240) is the prose version from which 'The Bee Meeting' was developed. In the story, the ritualistic element is made clear:

> The donning of the hats had been an odd ceremony. Their ugliness & anonymity very compelling, as if we were all party to a rite. . . . All faces, shaded, became alike. (*Dreams*, p. 242)

The I-speaker is aware of the ritual:

> The veil seemed hallucinatory. I could not see it for moments at a time. Then I became aware I was in a bone-stiff trance, intolerably tense, and shifted round to where I could see better. 'Spirit of my dead father, protect me!' I arrogantly prayed. (*ibid.* p. 242)

In another story, 'Among the Bumblebees' (*Dreams*, p. 259) this dominance is seen through the eyes of a child:

> When it was the right time of year, her father took her into the garden and showed her how he could catch bumblebees. That was something no one else's father could do. Her father caught a special kind of bumblebee that he recognized by its shape and held it in his closed fist, putting his hand to her ear. Alice liked to hear the angry, stifled buzzing of the bee, captured in the dark trap of her father's hand, but not stinging, not daring to sting. Then, with a laugh, her father would spread his fingers wide, and the bee would fly out, free, up into the air and away. (*Dreams*, p. 264)

Here the bee is subject to the male wish, and as in other poems, the suffocating element of male dominance is noted; in 'Wintering', the final poem of the sequence, there is no such dominance, the 'bees are flying. They taste the spring', an optimistic and positive ending to the poem with a certain degree

of ambiguity in 'spring': is it the season, linking with the survival of the hive into another year, or is it water, linking back to 'The Beekeeper's Daughter' and 'a well of scents'? With either interpretation there is a sensual awareness, and for Plath, such awareness is one of the indicators of rebirth, as I have already noted.

The Bee Poems

Because of her father's interest in bees, Plath's own interest is not unexpected, but there is a wider significance:

> Going into the oracular cave of Zeus-Trophonios meant going into the hallowed birth cave of the god. Here the infant god was fed and attended by giant bees, whose nourishing honey was considered divine amniotic fluid. . . . We know from other stories, such as the miraculous birth of St. Ambrose with a swarm of bees around his infant mouth, that the bee attendance portends the gift of honeyed speech, a golden tongue, a promise of nourishing words. (Hall 1980, p. 25-6)

Was Plath equating 'a golden tongue' with her poetic voice?[10]

The poems in this sequence are concerned with an initiation ritual. 'The Bee Meeting' (*Poems*, p. 211) begins with a meeting at the bridge, the I-speaker has to cross into a new way of being; this poem 'is a lengthy monologue that describes a mysterious rite of passage.' (Broe 1980, p. 146) The three agents of the initiation are the rector, God's representative, the midwife for the birthing and hence life, and the sexton for death. These are 'all gloved and covered', whereas the I-speaker has no protection in her 'sleeveless summery dress', she is 'nude

as a chicken neck'. The three agents are already veiled; the I-speaker is given 'a fashionable white straw Italian hat/And a black veil that molds to my face'; such veiling is of mythological significance:

> The archetype of rebirth is initiation. Initiation is an active entry into darkness. It means to "enter into" an experience of psychic significance with one's eyes closed, mouth shut, wearing a veil--a kind of veiling that paradoxically permits seeing. Covering the eyes for a time to the external world permits an inward focusing that tends to draw one's attention "down" and sometimes "backward". (Hall 1980, p. 24)

This downward movement is part of the rebirth archetype that Bodkin noted, and which I quoted earlier.

The I-speaker is led 'to the shorn grove, the circle of hives', she is to be admitted into an inner circle, perhaps that of self-knowledge, a theme running throughout the bee poems (Wagner 1988, p. 8). The villagers search for the queen who is 'old, old, old, she must live another year, and she knows it'; she 'does not show herself', and the villagers move the virgin bees so that 'there will be no killing.' Kroll has suggested the queen bee is 'the separable soul or totem of the protagonist' (Kroll 1978, pp. 138-9), but the queen has to die, has to be replaced by another bee. Rather than only representative of the separable soul, the whole sequence is a symbolic representation of the rebirth process.

> The villagers are untying their disguises, they are shaking hands.
> Whose is that long white box in the grove, what have they accomplished, why am I cold.

The I-speaker is aware of something strange in the grove. She has been led towards inner knowledge by the three agents of

rebirth and watched by the villagers; the 'long white box' is ambiguous: it can be taken as representing this inner knowledge; alternatively, it may be a coffin. Some part of the I-speaker has to 'die', an aspect of the process of individuation which I discussed in the previous chapter.

In 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' (*Poems*, p. 212) the 'long white box' of the previous poem has become 'this clean wood box/Square as a chair'; it 'is locked, it is dangerous' yet the I-speaker is mesmerised by it, 'I can't keep away from it', she tries to see into the dark centre where there is black on black, 'angrily clambering.' The I-speaker is fearful of this inner knowledge, it is the 'unintelligible syllables' that appal her, here is no 'honeyed speech'. She is afraid to let them out, afraid to release what she sees as an awe-ful power for it 'is like a Roman mob,/Small, taken one by one, but my god, together!' In the first poem the I-speaker was 'the magician's girl who does not flinch': she was subject to male magical power; in this second poem she recognises her own power:

> I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.
> They can be sent back.
> They can die, I need feed them nothing. I am the owner.

The I-speaker understands her own element of choice in life. Tomorrow, she says, 'I will be sweet God, I will set them free.' She is no longer afraid of self-knowledge, for the box 'is only temporary', she can control its contents. The visual image of the release of the bees represents the upward movement suggested by Bodkin.

In 'Stings' (*Poems*, p. 214) the I-speaker is now working with the bees on equal terms with a man, in contrast to the male domination in the first poem; it is she who searches for the queen:

> What am I buying, wormy mahogany?
> Is there any queen at all in it?
>
> If there is, she is old,
> Her wings torn shawls, her long body
> Rubbed of its plush--
> Poor and bare and unqueenly and even shameful.

In the previous poem the I-speaker had bought the 'clean wood box' which she now likens to 'wormy mahogany': she cannot believe that her other self which resides in this box, her unconscious, represents a better individual, she sees it rather as 'even shameful.' As with the previous reference in relation to the box, there is the same ambiguity: the box may also represent a coffin, with the connotations noted above. Briefly the I-speaker sees herself as like all other woman: 'I stand in a column//Of winged, unmiraculous women,/Honey-drudgers.' But she argues against this sameness: 'I am no drudge/Though for years I have eaten dust/And dried plates with my dense hair.'

> Will they hate me,
> Those women who only scurry,
> Whose news is the open cherry, the open clover?

In challenging the cultural norm for women, she realises that she may be unpopular. But she re-affirms her strength: 'I am in control.' Tillie Olsen comments of Plath at this time:

> . . . a woman poet of stature, accustomed through years to the habits of creation, began to live the life of most of her sex: the honey drudgers: the winged unmiraculous two-angel, whirled mother-maintenance life, that most women, not privileged, know. A situation without help or husband and with twenty-four hours' responsibility for two small human

> lives whom she adored and at their most fascinating and demanding. (Olsen 1965, p. 35)

Who is the 'third person' who is watching, a man who is 'a great scapegoat' and who 'has nothing to do with the bee-seller or with me'? The bees recognised that this stranger was an interloper and died for such recognition: they moulded themselves 'onto his lips like lies,/Complicating his features.//They thought death was worth it'. The I-speaker has her own difficulties:

> . . . but I
> Have a self to recover, a queen.
> Is she dead, is she sleeping?
> Where has she been,
> With her lion-red body, her wings of glass?
>
> Now she is flying
> More terrible than she ever was, red
> Scar in the sky, red comet
> Over the engine that killed her--
> The mausoleum, the wax house.

The I-speaker has found her other self and accepts that this self is more powerful then her earlier male-dominated one, she can rise above the problems which have been presented. She is indeed, 'no drudge', she has become the queen bee 'an analog for the fertile and liberated poet, the opposite of that dead drone in the wax house who was the sterile egotistical mistress of darkness and daddy.'[1] For Plath, the colour red is often associated with rebirth. In her journals, she wrote of 'the red sun rising like the eye of God out of a screaming blue sea' (*Journals*, p. 96); here red is the colour associated with the life-giving source of the sun, there is wordplay on 'eye' and 'I', and birth is perceived as painful. In 'Ariel', the I-speaker is 'at one with the drive/Into the red//Eye, the cauldron

of morning.'[12] In 'Lady Lazarus', the I-speaker will 'rise with my red hair'. Frazer notes that in a magic ceremony for the cure of jaundice, the ancient Hindoos would:

> banish the yellow colour . . . [and] procure for the patient a healthy red colour from a living, vigorous source . . . (Frazer 1924, p. 15)

In 'The Swarm' (*Poems*, p. 215), which was omitted by Hughes from *Ariel*, the sequence moves to an historical perspective. 'A psychic distance is gained by these cultural references.' (Broe 1980, pp. 154-5)

> The point of the poem is that the murders of history are much like the violence men commit against the natural world. (Rosenblatt 1979, p. 129)

Not only against the natural world, but specifically against women: 'They would have killed *me*' says the speaker, making sense of the earlier statement that it 'is you the knives are out for'. The use of battle imagery throughout seems an appropriate symbol for the conflict many women face, here depicted as the battle for male dominance epitomised by the Napoleonic wars. The core of the poem is the occasional tendency for bees to swarm somewhere high; any sudden noise will make them descend to a level where the bee-keeper can reach them. (*Poems*, p. 293) The bee was Napoleon's personal emblem. Plath made a connection between male conqueror and female conquered, between the bees, the 'winged, unmiraculous women,/Honey-drudgers' and the 'man with gray hands' who finally subdues them; bees, who, with 'dumb, banded bodies' walk 'the plank draped with Mother France's upholstery/Into a new mausoleum'. It is not a direct connection, since in the poem the

bees are female, while the emblem belongs to a male conqueror. The reader is offered through the bee colony 'a double image of feminity--the queen creator-destroyer and the dust-eating worker' (Bundtzen 1983, p. 186), the one, the new self recovered, the woman in control, no longer male-dominated; the other, the submissive female.

In the final poem of the sequence 'Wintering' (*Poems*, p. 217) the I-speaker is resting, for this is 'the easy time, there is nothing doing'; she has her honey, she is in control. There is a sense of threat contained in 'a dark without window/At the heart of the house' where there is 'rancid jam/And the bottles of empty glitters--'.'"Glittering" is a sinister, two-edged word in Plath's poems, invariably suggesting both seductiveness and destruction.' (Rosenthal & Gall 1983, p. 432) Here the suggestion is of decay, associated with the male, 'Sir So-and-so'.

> This is the room I have never been in.
> This is the room I could never breathe in.
> The black bunched in there like a bat,
> No light
> But the torch and its faint
>
> Chinese yellow on appalling objects--
> Black asininity. Decay.
> Possession.
> It is they who own me.

The I-speaker is able to look back at past events: she is aware of the suffocation of such events, an example of Plath's metaphor for the dominance by the male. It was ignorance, lack of awareness by 'them', implicitly male, that caused the I-speaker's

subjugation to such events. Now the I-speaker sees only the female:

> The bees are all women,
> Maids and the long royal lady.
> They have got rid of the men,
>
> The blunt, clumsy stumblers, the boors.
> Winter is for women--

Winter is a time of hibernation, a time of meditation:

> The woman, still at her knitting,
> At the cradle of Spanish walnut,
> Her body a bulb in the cold and too dumb to think.

Thought is suspended, life itself is suspended, yet the woman's body, the 'bulb', contains the flower of the future.

> Will the hive survive, will the gladiolas
> Succeed in banking their fires
> To enter another year?
> What will they taste of, the Christmas roses?

Already the I-speaker's thoughts are turning towards the future. The final line is an affirmation of the strength and hope of that future: 'The bees are flying. They taste the spring.' Here is the expansion, the upward movement noted by Bodkin in her discussion of the rebirth archetype in literature (Bodkin 1934, p. 54), together with the flower symbol associated by Jung with the final stage of the transformation process (Jung 1940, p. 93).

To summarise this section, in the opening poem of the bee sequence, the I-speaker is a witness to a rite of transformation, but at this point she is not apparently aware that it is her own transformation that is to occur. This is an example of Jung's definition of indirect rebirth. (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 115) By the end of the third poem, this transformation has become personal, a

movement towards direct rebirth, the process of 'inner transformation and rebirth into another being.' (Jung *ibid.* p. 131) In the second poem, the 'clean wood box' appears either to represent the new self which is perceived as dangerous, or to imply that some aspect of the I-speaker has to 'die'. Yet the I-speaker recognises that she is in control, that the box is a part of herself, 'I am the owner.' In setting the bees free, the I-speaker is implying that she herself will be freed and enabled to explore her new self, the self Plath explored through her poetry: 'the bee attendance portends the gift of honeyed speech'. (Hall 1980, p. 26) In 'Stings', the I-speaker is emerging from the male dominance of the first poem, and is recognising the sisterhood of the 'honey-drudgers'. She fears she may be rejected because she is in control and is 'no drudge'. In this poem we are offered a dual representation of the female, the submissive female of Western patriarchal culture and the 'queen creator-destroyer' (Bundtzen 1983, p. 186), the alternative, and to the male, frightening representation. In the final poem the I-speaker has achieved rebirth. No longer are the bees hibernating, they are free and flying.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, Hughes suggests that Plath's new poetic voice is not apparent until the autumn of 1961; of the poems written at this time, Plath included only one, 'The Rival', in her version of *Ariel*. I also suggested that this autumn should be regarded as the 'onset of labour' and the bee poems as the birth itself. In 'Poem for a Birthday' Plath explores her

own physical life experiences, particularly her electro-convulsive therapy resulting from her breakdown. In the bee poems she explores her psychical experiences, particularly her freedom from male domination. The birth of her self leads her to understand that not all can undergo the process of individuation, and that rejection can occur from those who do not.

There are some general comparisons which can be made between 'Poem for a Birthday' and the bee sequence in *Ariel*, the most obvious similarity being that each sequence provides a positive affirmation as the ending to the collection. In 'Poem for a Birthday' there are clear influences, those of Roethke, particularly his Greenhouse poems, and of Radin, whose *African Folktales* provides much of the esoteric imagery. In the bee poems influences are less obvious; some of the references to trees may owe their origin to *The White Goddess*. Melander points out that 'the bee imagery can rightly be claimed to be one of Sylvia Plath's at once most personal and most original poetic devices'. (Melander 1972, p. 91) We do not need the biographical information about Otto Plath's 'lifelong interest in entomology' (*Letters*, p. 9) to understand the significance of the bee metaphor for Plath; to have this information certainly adds depth of meaning, but the ritualistic nature of the experience is quite clear; we are witnessing an initiation into a new phase of life, the birth of the self expressed through the poetry.

In 'America! America!' (*Dreams*, p. 34) Plath wrote of an earlier initiation ceremony where the I-speaker 'was being tailored to an Okay Image':

> Somehow it didn't take--this initiation into the nihil of belonging. Maybe I was just too weird to begin with. . . . The privilege of being anybody was turning its other face--to the pressure of being everybody; ergo, no one. (*Dreams*, p. 37)

The use of the desolate phrase 'the nihil of belonging' shows the I-speaker's awareness of the illusory nature of 'belonging', that to become part of something can be to lose everything: the individual consumed in the crowd. In the sequence of bee poems, Plath was coming to terms with her own individuality which she perceived as setting her apart from the 'honey-drudgers.'

The Final Months

I suggested earlier that since the bee poems were the last sequence in *Ariel* Plath obviously attached great importance to them; I believe they record the 'birth' of her self, glimpses of which had been found throughout the poems of the years since 'Poem for a Birthday'. Both sequences were composed in the autumn; October was Plath's own birthday month.[13] Other poems already referred to and composed at this season in other years include 'Love Letter' dated 16 October 1960, 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' dated 29 September 1961, 'Mirror' dated 23 October 1961, 'Daddy' dated 12 October 1962, 'Fever 103°' dated 20 October 1962 and 'Lady Lazarus' dated 23-29 October 1962.[14] Poems subsequent to 'Death & Co.' Plath regarded as being for a third volume.

> She considered these poems a fresh start. She liked the different, cooler inspiration (as she described it) and the denser pattern, of the first of these, as they took shape.'[15]

Hughes points out that it was around Christmas 1962 that the *Ariel* collection was completed (*Poems*, p. 14); we can assume that Plath did not wish to include the remaining poems written up to the end of 1962 and that the poems of 1963 were for a new collection.

We have no means of knowing Plath's own thoughts as to the merits of these final poems, or whether she would have included all of them in a subsequent collection. I do not wish, in the following discussion, to suggest that they all fit exactly within the Jungian framework which is the basis of much of this thesis; as I have already pointed out, such an undertaking diminishes Plath's work. These final poems explore the emotions associated with the recognition of this new self: they are by no means celebratory, rather they often reveal a fear and a sadness.

There are only twelve poems that have been published from this final period, all dated between 28 January 1963 and 5 February 1963 with the exception of 'Sheep in Fog' which is also dated 2 December 1962 (see note '4 above). The opening line of 'Sheep in Fog' (*Poems*, p. 262) recalls 'Hardcastle Crags' and the contrast of a harsh natural landscape with the fragile human being. A sense of sadness permeates the later poem, sadness that the I-speaker is not other than she is; 'People or stars/Regard me sadly, I disappoint them'. The I-speaker perceives the train which 'leaves a line of breath' as an animal: 'O slow/Horse the color of rust':

> "Horse" is an archetype that is widely current in mythology and folk-lore. As an animal it represents the non-human psyche, the sub-human, animal side, and therefore the unconscious. . . . The horse is dynamic power and a means of locomotion; it carries one away like a surge of instinct. (Jung 1941, p. 29)

It seems the I-speaker is fearful of her instincts and her unconscious. The final line: 'Starless and fatherless, a dark water', stresses the preoccupation with the unconscious. The bee poems announced the new 'birth' of the self, but still the fear of the unknown is apparent. Within the 'pregnancy' metaphor this period of the final poems is that which succeeds the birth, when the mother is exhausted, aware of the new life which is now separate from, her yet dependent upon her. In these last poems, Plath was exploring her new self, a self which had been long in the birth process, and the nature of which could prove problematic.

In the context of the theme of rebirth it is worth noting the following lines from 'Totem' (*Poems*, p. 264), a poem I discussed in Chapter Two in the section on Plato:

> The world is blood-hot and personal
>
> Dawn says, with its blood-flush.
> There is no terminus, only suitcases
>
> Out of which the same self unfolds like a suit
> Bald and shiny, with pockets of wishes,
>
> Notions and tickets, short circuits and folding mirrors.
> I am mad, calls the spider, waving its many arms.[15]

The birth/death/rebirth cycle is suggested by 'dawn'. Emphasis is laid on the nature of the self, that there is no bodily change, it is the 'same self' which appears, the external

appearance of which is man- or woman-made, a 'suit'. Plath suggests the contents of the conscious and unconscious of this 'same self': there are desires, ideas, and the means to realise them, 'tickets'; 'short circuits', intuition perhaps, or a reference to electro-convulsive therapy which obliterates part of the memory, and perceived perhaps as a means to contentment; and 'folding mirrors', surely a reference to the divided self of 'The Munich Mannequins' and many other poems, the split between the 'I' as perceiver and the 'I' as perceived.[17] The line: 'I am mad, calls the spider, waving its many arms' represents a negative form of the final stage of transformation symbols which 'appear as the spider, the net, the prison.' (Jung 1940, p. 94) This negative form is repeated in 'Paralytic' (*Poems*, p. 266) in the prison of 'still waters' in which the I-speaker perceives herself--or perhaps himself. The rebirth image is suggested by the egg in which, says the I-speaker, 'I lie/Whole/On a whole world I cannot touch'; but the I-speaker is a 'dead' egg; as in other earlier poems, this suggests an aborted 'birth'.

In 'Gigolo' (*Poems*, p. 267), the split between the I as perceiver and as perceived discussed in 'Totem' above occurs again in the final lines of the poem:

> All the fall of water an eye
> Over whose pool I tenderly
> Lean and see me.

In the poem, 'In Plaster', domination of one aspect of the self was explored; in this later poem the 'I' and 'me' are 'tenderly' accepted: the aspects have been integrated. The word-play on

'tend' suggests the hospital environment which Plath uses in other rebirth poems. In 'Child' (*Poems*, p. 265), many of the positive transformation symbols are to be found: the child, the flower, the pool. (Jung *ibid.* p. 94) The opening line: 'Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing' has word play on 'eye/I', a device Plath uses in several poems, including 'Gigolo' quoted above. In this instance, the I-speaker perceives the child as possessing an unclouded identity. This 'eye/I' should be a pool in which 'images/Should be grand and classical': the eye is window to the soul, the pool is representative of the soul, or the unconscious, as I noted in 'Mirror' earlier in this chapter. But the I-speaker is afraid: the 'eye/I' should not be 'this troublous/Wringing of hands, this dark/Ceiling without a star.'

'The Munich Mannequins' (*Poems*, p. 262) considers the opposite of motherhood, sterility: 'Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.' Sterility is embodied in the dress models which are:

> Naked and bald in their furs,
> Orange lollies on silver sticks,
>
> Intolerable, without mind.

For the I-speaker, perfection means 'no more idols but me,//Me and you'; this is the divided self of the I-speaker. Perfection, the 'snow breath' of the first couplet, has no voice. It is possible to read this poem as Plath's expression, through her art, of her fears for her new self: will poems be born from it, or will she find herself voiceless? I have already noted that, for Plath, 'children' represented both human offspring and poems;

if we use this latter interpretation, it would seem that she is aware that artistic creativity is a striving for, rather than an attainment of, 'perfection'.

The poem 'Mystic' (*Poems*, p. 268) carries the same sense of threat found in work written slightly earlier: the 'kiss' of the flies, the 'dead smell of sun on wood cabins', the 'long salt winding sheets.' 'Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?' asks the I-speaker, implying not that the sight of God inspires, rather that it terrifies:

> Christ, as a hero and god-man, signifies psychologically the self; that is, he represents the projection of this most important and most central of archetypes. (Jung 1956, p. 368)

If we assume that the God-figure is the self, then it is a glimpse of the whole personality which is terrifying. I have already quoted Jacobi on the difficulties of the process of individuation (Jacobi 1943, p. 101); we have to remember that Plath was exploring this process alone and largely unaided, a perilous undertaking; it seems possible that having seen the goal she had long sought, the experience was overwhelming.

> Without a part left over,
> Not a toe, not a finger, and used,
> Used utterly, in the sun's conflagrations, . . .

The speaker 'has been seized up':

> In symbolical language, being devoured represents a kind of descent into the underworld, a sinking back into the womb, resulting in the extinction of consciousness, the death of the ego. (Jacobi 1959, p. 155)

The speaker is searching for 'a remedy', seeking this within religious ceremony, within history, within the simple life. 'Is

there no great love, only tenderness?' she asks. The search is for meaning to life, a meaning which 'leaks from the molecules'. Perhaps Plath is implying that, for the I-speaker in this poem, meaning is to be found not in the 'whole' of an object, event or experience, but in its 'parts'.

> The chimneys of the city breathe, the window sweats,
> The children leap in their cots.
> The sun blooms, it is a geranium.
>
> The heart has not stopped.

This is the positive statement, the realization that the I-speaker is not dead, that she is awake to sensual experience; the I-speaker in 'Mystic' has been reborn.

This positive theme is expanded in the remaining five poems which are the last published works; there are none dated for the final week of her life. In 'Kindness' (*Poems*, p. 269) the I-speaker perceives her house--a metaphor for her body--as pervaded by kindness. The conflict depicted in 'In Plaster' is over.

> The blue and red jewels of her rings smoke
> In the windows, the mirrors
> Are filling with smiles.

Jung allocates red to the Eros principle and blue to the Logos principle (Jung 1940, p. 40); the I-speaker perceives herself as a fully integrated being whose other 'self' or 'selves' are accepted. Such integration I noted in 'Gigolo'.

> Sugar can cure everything, so Kindness says.
> Sugar is a necessary fluid

For bees, sugar is life-giving; for the I-speaker sweetness, perhaps a metaphor for a lack of conflict, is equally necessary.

The blood jet is poetry,
There is no stopping it.
You hand me two children, two roses.

Poetry, for the I-speaker, is the life-blood of existence. In the final line there are two of the last stage transformation symbols, and we should recall the lines from 'The Stones': 'The vase, reconstructed, houses/The elusive rose.' The I-speaker of 'Poem for a Birthday' perceives only one self; the I-speaker of 'Kindness' knows that there is more than one.

'Contusion' (*Poems*, p. 281) is a difficult poem: each stanza appears complete in itself. The speaker contemplates a bruise, perhaps a metaphor for the damaged heart or soul, an inner damage, then she sees the hollow, the emptiness that is 'the whole sea's pivot', she is looking within herself and contemplating loss. But the sea fills the hollow, the unconscious will overcome this sense of loss. The 'heart shuts' and the 'mirrors are sheeted', an ambiguous phrase which could mean an awareness of death--but this is viewing the poem through the lens of Plath's suicide--or it could mean that the speaker has no need to look in a mirror, since she has accepted the presence of the 'other'. 'The doom mark/Crawls down the wall' recalls the short story by Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall' in which she meditates on, and offers different interpretations of, a stain.[19] It is a mark 'made by a nail'; it may not be a hole but 'some round black substance, such as a small rose leaf'; it may be 'the head of a gigantic nail'. It is finally identified as a snail. We know that Plath read Woolf, she refers

to 'the blessed diary of Virginia Woolf' (*Journals*, p. 152) and writes to her mother that she has 'read three Virginia Woolf novels this week and find them excellent stimulation for my own writing.' (*Letters*, p. 324) Part of Woolf's meditation concerns the perceived and perceiving I:

> All the time I'm dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, lovingly, stealthily, not openly adoring it, for if I did that, I should catch myself out, and stretch my hand at once for a book in self-protection. Indeed, it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry . . . Or is it not so very curious after all? It is a matter of great importance. Supposing the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people - what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! . . . As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; . . And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a kndowledge of it for granted . . (p. 145)

Plath was influenced by more than the 'snail'.

'Balloons' (*Poems*, p. 271) dated 5 February has, through its title, a link with the mandala, the magic circle symbolism of the individual in equilibrium. (Jacobi 1943, pp. 128-9) It is also possible to see this circle symbolism in the phrases 'queer moons' and 'globes of thin air'. Ostensibly this poem concerns children and balloons but the speaker notes the pureness of the child's world, 'clear as water'; the child's unconscious is not troubled, in contrast to that of the I-speaker in 'Child' whose unconscious is a 'dark/Ceiling without a star.' Is the dark perceived as total, or surrounding a single point of light? The

star forms a symbol of the self at the end of the transformation process.

'Edge' (*Poems*, p. 272) also dated 5 February is the last poem, and it is difficult to offer an interpretation uninfluenced by Plath's suicide. The title implies a barrier reached, perhaps a crossing to be made; the speaker--and we should note the use of the third person, one of Plath's distancing devices--is examining some part of her life which she sees as finished, completed. In 'The Munich Mannequins', perfection was seen as sterility; is Plath, through the speaker, suggesting the fear of a barren period in her writing career? The prose version of the poem was written in 1956:

> so the hungry cosmic mother sees the world shrunk to embryo again and her children gathered sleeping back into the dark, huddling in bulbs and pods, pale and distant as the folded bean seed to her full milky love which freezes across the sky in a crucifix of stars. (*Journals*, p. 92)

Eight years later this formed a part of the poem:

> The woman is perfected.
> Her dead
>
> Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
> The illusion of a Greek necessity
>
> Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
> Her bare
>
> Feet seem to be saying:
> We have come so far, it is over.
>
> Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
> One at each little
>
> Pitcher of milk, now empty.
> She has folded
>
> Them back into her body as petals
> Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

If we read 'Edge' through the lens of Plath's suicide, it is a poem of despair; there are images of death throughout: the 'dead/Body', 'it is over'; the 'dead child', 'stiffens'; such images occur in the prose: 'freezes', 'crucifix'. But there is an alternative reading. The prose contains imagery of the nucleus of life: 'embryo', 'bulbs and pods' 'seed', and 'crucifix' has connotations of resurrection; the central image in the poem, the flowers closing at dusk, implies a re-opening at dawn, the rebirth of the sun (Jung 5, p. 245). And so, the moon 'has nothing to be sad about' for she 'is used to this sort of thing': the cycles of life/death/rebirth implicit in the phases of the moon, in the rise and set of the sun, in the blossoming and fading of flowers, will be repeated in human life.

It is the last line that is the most difficult: 'Her blacks crackle and drag.' These could be the shadows cast by moonlight, a darkness which nevertheless contains sound and movement, it could refer to the dark side of the moon, that face turned from the light wherein exist strange forms; it could be an idiosyncratic image. As an ending to a body of work which contained a number of esoteric images, it leaves the reader with

a query which can never be answered.

Conclusion

In Chapter Five, I suggested that 'Poem for a Birthday' should be considered as the 'conception' of Plath's new self. In this chapter, I have discussed the sequence of bee poems with which Plath concluded her version of *Ariel*, and have suggested that this sequence can be viewed as the 'birth' of that new self. I have traced the various stages of the transformation process through the symbols used in the poems, relating these to the process of individuation which Plath was undergoing. I have found evidence of 'abortions' and 'false starts', but in the bee sequence the self is 'born': this is the 'rebirth' which, if we use the prose work as additional evidence, Plath seems to have sought from early adulthood. She did not include in her version of *Ariel* the poems written immediately after the 'birth': possibly she did not consider them suitable. Those she wrote at the beginning of 1963 she considered to be for her next volume of work.

These final twelve poems can be read as an exploration of the emotions generated by the birth of this new self; there is a sense of fear, perhaps a fear of personal inadequacy in relation to this self. But there is also a sense of hope, a recognition of the possibilities to be explored: 'she is searching each poetic context for a frank, literary version of the emotional

growth that she is experiencing.' (Broe 1980, p. 83) Plath wrote: 'Being born a woman is my awful tragedy' (*Journals*, pp. 29-30), but we can see that it was in the exploration of her female destiny that she produced some of her finest work.

SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Symbolism within the Jungian Framework

The work of Carl Jung has provided much of the theoretical base for this thesis. I have examined other writers who may have influenced Plath, and I have traced Plath's use of the symbolism of stone and water throughout her work, relating it to Jung's own use of these symbols; I have discussed her use of the theme of rebirth, relating it to the central concept of Jung's psychology, the process of individuation, and I have acknowledged the concept within that process of individuation which may be different for women from that proposed by Jung, namely, the death of the ego.

In my analyses I have not discussed Plath's use of the symbol of the moon.[1] This is not through any lack of significance in the Jungian framework: Jung notes that the moon can be a mother-symbol (Jung 9, Part 1, p. 81), and in his discussion of *Hiawatha* comments that, according to ancient belief:

> the moon is the gathering-place of departed souls . . . a guardian of the seed, and hence a source of life with a feminine significance (Jung 5, pp. 317-318).

The moon also symbolically represents a vessel and hence the uterus (Jung 5, p. 203). There is one further symbolic representation of the moon which should be noted. In his researches into the historical bases for the process of individuation, Jung found that:

> Gnosticism contains striking parallels to the symbolism of the process of individuation. But a gap of almost 1,600

years separates us from that peculiar religious philosophy. (Jung 1940, p. 28)

His searches led him to an analysis of alchemy and he discovered that 'analytical psychology coincided in a most curious way with alchemy' (Jung 1963, p. 196).

> I am now satisfied that alchemy is the requisite mediaeval exemplar of this concept of individuation. There is a real continuity in the unremitting attempts of human minds to deal with the problem from the first century of our era on to the middle of the eighteenth. Goethe's Faust is the last magnificent link in "Homer's golden chain," and at the same time the introduction of the problem to a new, psychologically minded age. (Jung 1940, p. 28)

As a symbol, the moon formed one of many representations of the *prima materia*, 'one of the most famous secrets of alchemy' (Jung 12, p. 304):

> . . . the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content. It was of course impossible to specify such a substance, because the projection emanates from the individual and is consequently different in each case. (Jung 12, p. 304)

Other representations include iron, gold, sulphur, water, earth, blood, cloud, shadow, sea, mother (Jung 12, p. 304), and it was obviously a profoundly significant symbol. However, in terms of the theme of rebirth, I believe discussion of stone and water symbolism to be of greater relevance than that of the moon.[2]

One comment made by Jung in relation to symbolism merits particular attention. He states that a woman's psyche differs from a man's and continues:

> But traditional symbolism is chiefly a product of the masculine psyche and is, therefore, not a suitable object of imitation for woman. (Jung 1940, p. 95)

Let us examine the assumptions contained in this quotation. We need not argue that the symbolism he was discussing--in this instance, that of the process of transformation--is a product of the masculine psyche: it is Jung who has identified such symbolism; but why should this be unsuitable for a woman? Does a different psyche indicate the need for a different set of symbols? Jung is possibly suggesting that a woman is unable to access such symbolism, and it is at this point that we recognise the significance of the word 'imitation': in order to imitate there must be a model. Is Jung implying that a woman might imitate a man in her use of symbolism? If so, from where does the model which the woman uses appear? Analyses of symbols are through dreams, or through an artist's work and to imitate in either of these contexts seems unreasonable. But is this statement of Jung's accurate?

Let us consider the following:

> The novelistic evidence with which I was concerned made it clear to me that the masculine culture held no monopoly on archetypal patterns . . . (Pratt 1981, p.6)

> Symbolic representations . . . depend on a fund of shared recognitions and potential inference. For their intended impact to *take hold* in the reader's imagination, the author simply must . . . be able to call upon a shared context with her audience. (Garner et al 1985, p. 256)

> Women can talk to women, women can write for women and it can no longer be discounted as 'not the *real* thing'. (Spender 1980, p. 217)

> . . . the intense inner event, the personal and psychological, was inseparable from the universal . . . (Rich 1979, p. 168) [writing of Emily Dickinson]

All the above are from writings by women. If Jung's statement were accurate, then Plath would not have had access to the symbols I have discussed, her work would not appeal to and be understood by so many women, it would appeal to and be understood only by men. From the vast number of publications by women on Plath, this is clearly not so.

The comment by Annis Pratt concerns novels: I have already commented on the archetypal patterns which occur in *The Bell Jar*; the second and third quotations demonstrate that others have found symbolic representation to be understood by women, such representation is tapping into their collective unconscious; the fourth quotation takes the issue wider, the inner event is a microcosm of the universal experience.

> What is essential in a work of art is that it should rise far above the realm of personal life and speak from the spirit and heart of the poet as man to the spirit and heart of mankind. (Jung 1941, p. 194)

If we substitute 'woman' for 'man' in the above quotation, it becomes an accurate description of Plath's work.

The experience of the process of individuation, the process of moving from one stage of life to another, is an experience that can be, although is not necessarily, shared by all, female and male. It may also possibly reflect the movement of a culture, a society, from one stage to another, with the pain involved in such a growth process. If we accept the universality of this process, then there is sense in Plath's use of the Holocaust and other political images to express her personal situation: the

movement private to public and *vice versa*, rather than denigrating the public experience illustrates its relevance to a much wider audience than those aware at the time of such happenings. Of 'Poem for a Birthday', Aird notes:

> For the first time in this poem she directly faced the task of relating individual to general experience. (Aird 1979, p. 68)

Plath suggests that the private disastrous experience, when translated into words, should represent that experience in a manner as understandable as the public awareness of the horror of the concentration camps:

> I think that personal experience is very important, but certainly it shouldn't be a kind of shut-box and mirror-looking, narcissistic experience. I believe it should be *relevant*, and relevant to the larger things, the bigger things such as Hiroshima and Dachau and so on. (Orr 1966, pp. 169-170)

It can be no coincidence that at a time when Western societies were struggling to come to terms with the post-war world, some of her poems express the fragmentation of the self, a representation of the fragmentation of that society, and of the 'fragmentation among women [which] is merely a replication of the fragmentation from each other that we undergo in the society outside'. (Rich 1979, p. 137)

Jung's comment on the unsuitability of the symbolism for women appears to reflect the *zeitgeist* of his era rather than to be an accurate statement; a woman's psyche was an area largely unknown to him, as he demonstrated in, for example, his considerations of the *anima*; by comparison, the *animus* receives little attention. Plath's continuing appeal must surely rest, to some extent, on

the 'shared context': her audience, female and male, must be able to respond appropriately to her symbolic representations. That her work does still have such strength is evidenced by the number of critical works that continue to appear; the last few years have seen the publication of a bibliography (Tabor 1987), a biography (Wagner-Martin 1988), and a collection of critical essays (Wagner 1988), together with reviews and articles, several in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the poet's death. Anne Stevenson's biography, *Bitter Fame*, has recently been published.

Self Discovery

Is the question of rebirth personal to an individual, or can it be viewed in a wider context? Langbaum suggests that 'the longing for death, which pervades the modern waste land, is a longing for renewal'. (Langbaum 1957, p. 104) It would appear to be a universal phenomenon; but is there a difference for women?

> Women's rebirth journeys . . . create transformed, androgynous, and powerful human personalities out of socially devalued beings and are therefore more likely to involve denouements punishing the quester for succeeding in her perilous, revolutionary journey. (Pratt 1981, p. 142)

The woman is punishing herself for not conforming to a (probably male-defined) stereotype, but significantly, her rebirth involves the assumption of power.[3]

> We strive to uphold the virtues and aesthetic ideals which the patriarchal superego has presented to us. But we are filled with self-loathing and a deep sense of personal

> ugliness and failure when we can neither meet nor mitigate the superego's standards of perfection.[4]

Rich (1986) suggests that in 'the desire to be twice-born there is a good deal of self-hatred' (p. 143): for many women who could not conform to the male-created image of woman, the self-hatred was expressed as hatred of one's mother: this was particularly true in America in the late 1950's. (Jacobus 1979, p. 32) In seeking to be reborn 'and not of woman' (*Journals*, p. 112) Plath was endeavouring to overcome this self-hatred by removing herself from her (male-defined) female status.

Other critics have offered alternative interpretations to the rebirth theme in Plath's work: it has been suggested that poems such as 'Lady Lazarus', 'Stings' and 'Ariel' 'establish a pattern of paradox in which the persona is reborn - but into nothingness';[5] that Plath's quest for rebirth failed 'as it led her continuously in a circle back to the same self in the same world';[6] that she 'wanted to be reborn into the liberty of her own distant childhood' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979, p. 254). All these appear to suggest not a psychic rebirth, but a bodily rebirth, albeit expressed metaphorically, whereas it was psychic regeneration Plath sought, she was 'preoccupied with imagining a psychic rebirth for herself as she approached her thirtieth birthday.'[7]

> In 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which turned out to be the start of the political organization of feminists in America. In 1963 Sylvia Plath killed herself and was born again to a dominant role in the world of letters; her autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* appeared in 1963, *Ariel*, her last great book of poems in 1965, and her work has been constantly published, debated, followed, ever

> since. No writer has meant more to the current feminist movement, though Plath was hardly a "movement" person, and she died at age thirty before it began. (Moers 1977, pp. xii-xiii)

At the time when Plath was writing much of her innovative work, others were also publishing important works, Sexton, Rich, Levertov, Atwood: 'I take 1960 as an approximate point of departure' (Ostriker 1987, p. 7).

> . . . the private life of the poet himself, especially under stress of psychological crisis, becomes a major theme. Often it is felt at the same time as *a symbolic embodiment of national and cultural crisis.* (Rosenthal 1967, p. 15, my italics)

Plath knew the perils of wifehood as encoded in Western culture in the 1950's: 'I must get back into the world of my creative mind: otherwise, in the world of pies and shin beef, I die.' (*Journals*, p. 157) As Bassnett has pointed out, one Plath myth concerns that of 'Sylvia the feminist precursor, whose works testify to the bitter resentment felt by women unable to free themselves from oppressive and oppressing roles.' (Bassnett, 1987, p. 2) Plath notes in her journal:

> Dangerous to be so close to Ted day in day out. I have no life separate from his, am likely to become a mere accessory. Important to take German lessons, go out on my own, think, work on my own. Lead separate lives. I must have a life that supports me inside. . . . Must never become a mere mother and housewife. Challenge of baby when I am so unformed and unproductive as a writer. A fear for the meaning and purpose of my life. I will hate a child that substitutes itself for my own purpose: so I must make my own. (*Journals*, pp. 326-327)

Plath recognised 'the problem that has no name' of which Betty Friedan wrote in *The Feminine Mystique*; Plath noted in 1951:

> And yet does it not all come again to the fact that it is a man's world? . . . But women have lust, too. Why should they be relegated to the position of custodian of emotions,

> watcher of the infants, feeder of soul, body and pride of man? (*Journals*, pp. 29-30)

At the same time, she was writing to her mother that learning 'the limitations of a woman's sphere is no fun at all.' (*Letters*, p. 72) Some six years later she wrote in a letter, again to her mother:

> I miss not cooking, and keeping up the house . . . I am simply not a career woman, and the sacrifice of energy and lifeblood I'm making for this job is all out of proportion to the good I'm doing in it. (*Letters*, p. 329)

Plath was experiencing the conflict between 'caterer and creator' (Huf 1983, p. 6), between woman and poet.[8]

> To be conscious, to name, to identify, to be intelligent, to create art, is to be masculine. To be the muse of or the image in art is to be feminine. The circle is endless; it confines the female to specific roles. (Stewart 1981, p. 109)

In seeking rebirth, Plath was seeking herself, her self; in giving birth to this creative personality she discovered 'the sorrows and responsibilities she has assumed with her new offspring'. (Stewart 1981, p. 108)

> The authoring of oneself through the written word is a form of creating one's existence anew, of reconceiving oneself. By the end of each autobiographical account of breakdown and recovery, there is always the implicit understanding that the author, as in a conversion narrative, has been born again, and that the new self that she has mothered is sane. (Yalom 1985, p. 111)

As I have previously noted, in relation to the theme of rebirth, Plath's own comments on her shock treatment are important: she visualises herself as 'born again, and not of woman.' (*Journals*, p. 113) We should note the allusion to *Macbeth*:

> Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
> The power of man, for none of woman born
> Shall harm Macbeth. (IV.1.79-81)

Plath perceives her own rebirth as endowing her with the ability to overcome some part of the Western patriarchal influence. I do not believe that this is an anti-feminist statement, rather it is a recognition of the problems that a patriarchal society generate for women, such problems being encoded in the language of that society.[9] Plath wrote of her own rebirth, and wrote of it through her experiences as a woman: it is this aspect which accounts for much of her continuing appeal to women.

At the end of *The Bell Jar* the new self, the new Esther Greenwood is reborn, sane. She makes a number of statements about herself: after she has finally ended the relationship with Irwin, 'I was perfectly free' (*Bell*, p. 255); after Joan's funeral, 'I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am' (*Bell*, p. 256); and the final lines of the book:

> The eyes and the faces all turned themselves towards me, and guiding myself by them, as by a magical thread, I stepped into the room. (*Bell*, p. 258)

A room is the archetypal trope for the feminine self. (Ostriker 1987, p. 72) In Jungian terms, Esther has integrated the shadow, has integrated the *animus*, and can now experience her self, the self which has been 'born twice - patched, retreaded and approved for the road.' (*Bell*, p. 257) Through the novel Plath explored some of the emotions she associated with her own breakdown and subsequent recovery, her rebirth. In the act of writing 'one may become mother to oneself as well as to literary progeny.' (Yalom 1985, p. 103)

To summarise, a woman writing within a patriarchal culture is subject to the images of woman in that culture; this sets up a conflict between 'her role as a woman, demanding selfless devotion to others, and her aspirations as an artist, requiring exclusive commitment to work.' (Huf 1983, p. 5) In seeking rebirth, Plath was seeking to combine the woman and the artist, to become an undivided whole and through her work we can trace her efforts to integrate the shadow, the negative aspects of her female self, and to integrate the *animus*, the masculine elements in her nature. Only when she had achieved this integration, when she had faced the death of the false self, could the true self, the whole personality be born. Hughes' discussion of individuation was one of my starting points for this thesis; in his introduction to the journals he comments, with hindsight, on Plath's need for a new birth which 'is the death of the old false self in the birth of the new real one.' (*Journals*, p. xiv) Alicia Ostriker discusses the split selves from a different viewpoint:

> The split selves in women's poems are both true, both false--or rather their truth or falsity is not the issue. The issue is division: that the halves do not combine to a whole . . . the division reflects and is reinforced by our culture's limited images of feminine personality. (Ostriker 1987, p. 84)

Plath sought to overcome the split within herself. We can only speculate that she may have perceived herself as failing in this undertaking, despite the evidence of the final poems as I have discussed them, and that such perception was a contributory factor to her suicide. If we consider suicide to be self-

punishment, was Plath castigating herself for succeeding in the search for her self?

Epilogue

I have endeavoured to consider Sylvia Plath's work without using her suicide as a filter for my analyses. As Bassnett has noted:

> One wonders . . . whether the fact of her suicide has not become a framing text through which readers must pass before reaching the poems or stories themselves. (Bassnett 1987, p. 3)

Within the Jungian framework, I have demonstrated that she underwent the process of individuation. Why then did she feel the compulsion to take her own life? Plath asked the same question of Woolf's suicide:

> Why did Virginia Woolf commit suicide? Or Sara Teasdale or the other brilliant women? Neurotic? Was their writing sublimation (oh, horrible word) of deep, basic desires? If only I knew. (*Journals*, p. 61)

We, Plath readers, may ask the same questions. In her own notes on Jung Plath copied that there 'is no birth of consciousness without pain.'[10] This quotation is taken from Jung's essay on marriage; it was perhaps with the breakup of her marriage that Plath became acutely aware of her own needs, of what she was, and of what she had been seeking throughout her life. In a patriarchal culture, 'women are tacitly and explicitly discouraged from gratifying their own needs or seeking fulfillment of their own desires.' (Wehr 1988, p. 101) In order to meet her own needs, a woman must discard that culture's images of her, she must fight.

> . . . if women assume that their own needs have equal validity and proceed to explore and state them more openly, they will be seen as creating conflict and must bear the psychological burden of rejecting men's images of "true womanhood." This can lead to discomfort, anxiety, and even more serious reactions for both parties. (Miller 1976, p. 17)

Inevitably Jung's texts refer to 'he', but by substituting 'she' in the following, we can see the relevance that Plath may have seen:

> Middle life is the moment of greatest unfolding, when a man still gives himself to his work with his whole strength and his whole will. . . . instead of looking forward one looks backward, most of the time involuntarily, and one begins to take stock, to see how one's life has developed up to this point. The real motivations are sought and real discoveries are made. The critical survey of himself and his fate enables a man to recognize his peculiarities. But these insights do not come to him easily; they are gained only through the severest shocks. (Jung 17, p. 193)

No doubt she also noted the lack of reference to women in this passage. Plath did not make any notes on the above, but it follows a passage which she did annotate; it is feasible that she would have read it, and that she would have interpreted 'the severest shocks' as the breakup of her marriage.

In the passage already quoted on the unsuitability of the process of individuation for all, Jacobi notes that the 'attempt to go such a journey alone . . . would be perilous for the Occidental, if it succeeded at all.' (Jacobi 1943, p. 101) Annis Pratt notes that the 'rebirth journey entails risk and psychological danger, as likely to lead to madness as to renewal.' (Pratt 1981, p. 142) I do not wish to suggest that Plath perceived herself as mad; rather that the perilousness of the journey lay in the solitary nature of the travelling. Plath was alone in a

physical sense except for her children who were too young to be other than dependent. Rather than viewing the end of the journey as an achievement, that of the self reborn, she may, as the I-speaker expressed it in 'Mystic' have seen it in negative terms. 'Once one has seen God, what is the remedy?' She may have seen it as the cessation of growth, as did the speaker in 'The Munich Mannequins': 'Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children'; ultimately, the 'woman is perfected'. ('Edge'). Had Plath received support, perhaps the rebirth would have been less traumatic; I find the comment that 'she had not needed rebirth but just needed some counseling' (Wagner-Martin 1988, p. 230) derogatory. To accept this would be to deny the images of rebirth which pervade Plath's work, such images tracing the development of her self, from the organic nadir of the stone, the metaphor for the fundamental essence of the individual, through the plunge into the waters of the unconscious, to the final emergence of the whole personality, 'the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being.' (Jung 17, p. 171) Plath found her own unique individuality; it is our loss that as her search ended, so did her life.

NOTES

ONE - INTRODUCTION

1 All quotations from the Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung will be identified by the volume number. Full references are given in the Bibliography.

2 Ted Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', p. 163, in Paul Alexander (ed) *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985)

3 See Sigmund Freud's essay, 'Femininity' in Volume 2, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Translated by James Strachey, The Pelican Freud Library, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973) for further discussion.

4 This reference is from Nancy Hunter-Steiner, *A Closer Look at Ariel: A Memory of Sylvia Plath*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 11. Much of this text provides an excellent description of the socio-cultural background in which Plath was born and educated.

5 Ted Hughes, *op. cit.* p. 156.

6 See the Editor's Note, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. xi, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983)

7 Plath notes on Jung, (source unspecified), p. 2, dated 1962, supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Mass. My research shows that this reference to Jung is taken from *The Development of Personality*, p. 184, Volume 17 of the Collected Works, translated by R F C Hull, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).

8 The Jung notes were supplied by Smith College with the comment that while not having any of Jung's works among Sylvia Plath's volumes, they did have 'four pages of Plath's manuscript notes derived from a reading of Jung. These were dated by Ted Hughes as [1962] and come from a notebook of some sort which has not survived otherwise.' From a personal letter to me dated 26 February 1988.

9 Naomi R Goldenberg, 'A Feminist Critique of Jung', p. 444, in *Signs*, 1976, 2, No. 2, 443-449. This essay forms the basis for much of this section of the chapter, together with her essay 'Feminism and Jungian Theory', in *Anima*, 1977, 3, No. 2, 14-17.

10 Ted Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

11 At the head of the passage from which this quotation is taken, the editors comment that 'Plath found herself slipping into a very serious depression' (*Journals*, p. 104).

12 I examine this issue in greater detail in my concluding chapter.

Suzanne Juhasz offers a discussion of the conflict between woman and poet, in Chapter 1, 'The Double Bind of the Woman Poet', *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Woman, A New Tradition*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1976).

13 Plath wrote to her mother on 16 October 1962: 'I am a genius of a writer: I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name . . . .' See the editors' comment, (*Journals*, p. 355).

14 For a discussion of the speaking subject, see Chapter 3, 'Addressing the Subject', in Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, (London & New York: Methuen, 1980).

15 Edward Butscher comments that it is not known if Plath read Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*, see note 7, p 371 in *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976). This is in connection with Plath's 'conception of the bell-jar metaphor' (*ibid*,). It is possible that the following passage is a likely source: 'These moments of despair--I mean glacial suspense--a painted fly in a glass case . . .' (Woolf 1954, p. 311) Butscher's comment is inaccurate; as I indicate, Plath wrote to her mother about this text (*Letters*, p. 305), and commented in the *Journals* in February 1957: '. . . I pick up the blessed diary of Virginia Woolf which I bought with a battery of her novels . . .' (*Journals*, p. 152). While it appears that both the *Letters* and *Journals* may have been published subsequent to Butscher's work, the information was available.

16 See an earlier section of this chapter, The Prose Writings.

17 See Pamela Smith's essay: 'Architectonics: Sylvia Plath's Colossus', pp. 111-124, in Edward Butscher (ed.), *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work*, (London: Peter Owen, 1979).

TWO - INFLUENTIAL TEXTS

1 See, for example, Judith Kroll, *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978).

2 Stephen Spender, 'The Making of a Poem', p. 70 in P E Vernon (ed), *Creativity: Selected Readings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).

3 Spender, *ibid.*, p. 73.

4 Susan Gilbert, 'In Yeats' House', p. 152 in Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom (eds), *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

5 Stephen Spender, 'Warnings from the Grave', p. 201, in Charles Newman (ed), *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1970).

6 Linda W Wagner-Martin in *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p. 262, lists a selection of Plath's personal library, including Erich Fromm's *Fear of Freedom*, now held at The Lilly Library, Indiana University.

7 The two sets of notes on Plato have been supplied by the Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, and form part of the Plath Manuscript Collection held at that Library.

8 I am grateful to Professor Michael Stokes of the Classics Department, University of Durham, for his assistance.

9 Mary Ellen Chase, cited by Dorothea Krook in 'Recollections of Sylvia Plath', p. 51 in Edward Butscher (ed), *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work*, (London: Peter Owen, 1979).

10 The copyright date on Butscher's text above is 1977. He notes that Krook's memoir was specifically commissioned for the anthology. Butscher, *ibid.* p. ix.

11 Krook in Butscher, *ibid.*, p. 51.

12 On the catalogue page detailing Plath's volumes on Plato, it has been noted by the Rare Book Room at Smith College that there is underlining and annotation in three of the four volumes. The exception is *Plato*, Volume 1, The Loeb Classical Library.

13 The text from which this passage is taken is the 1975 reprint of the Loeb Classical Library series on Plato. According to the above catalogue page, Plath used the 1953 reprint.

14 For discussion of the Platonic concept of reincarnation, see, for example, Plato, *Phaedo*, [ed. David Bostock] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 38-41.

15 For discussion of the Platonic doctrine of transmigration, see, for example, I M Crombie, *Plato: The Midwife's*

Apprentice, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1964), p. 12.

16 Barbara Hardy, 'The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: Enlargement or Derangement?' p. 177 in Martin Dodsworth (ed), *The Survival of Poetry: A Contemporary Survey by Donald Davie, Martin Dodsworth, Barbara Hardy, Derwent May, Gabriel Pearson and Anthony Thwaite* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970).

17 Sylvia Plath, 'Some Notes on the Gorgias', p. 12, unpublished notes supplied by the Lilly Library: see note 7 above.

18 Sylvia Plath, 'Some Preliminary Notes on Plato and Popper: concerning The Republic', p. 3, unpublished notes supplied by the Lilly Library: see note 7 above.

19 Alicia Ostriker, 'The Americanization of Sylvia', p. 106 in Linda W Wagner (ed), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath* (Boston: G K Hall, 1984).

20 I have used the abridged edition of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, as this is the version which Plath herself used. Her edition is now lodged in the Smith College Library Rare Book Room and was a gift from her mother in 1953. (Personal letter to me from Ruth Mortimer, Curator of Rare Books, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., dated 10 February 1988.)

21 Sylvia Plath, 'Some Notes on the Gorgias', *op. cit.*, page unnumbered.

22 Barbara Antonina Clarke Mossberg, 'Sylvia Plath's Baby Book' p. 187, in Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom (eds) *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twnetieth Century* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985).

23 Judith Kroll in *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), p. 181, offers full details of the biblical references to Ariel.

24 Plath used the Jowett translation of *The Republic*, as noted earlier in the text.

THREE - IMAGES OF STONE

1 The unpublished Plath notes on Jung have been supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts, and are entitled 'Jung'. (See note 7, Chapter One).

2 The date in Plath's volume of *The Golden Bough* is 1953. (Personal letter to me from Ruth Mortimer, Curator of Rare Books, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, dated 10 February 1988.)

3 See Chapter Five - The Theme of Rebirth - 1, for these definitions.

4 Ted Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', p. 157 in Paul Alexander (ed), *Ariel Ascending: Writings About Sylvia Plath*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

5 Hughes, *ibid.*, p. 157.

6 Hughes, *ibid.*, p. 160.

7 Hughes, *ibid.*, p. 156.

8 'The poems of *Ariel*, written in 1962, were an extraordinary change from the careful, highly promising, but seldom exciting work of *The Colossus* (1960).' M L Rosenthal, *The New Poets: American and British Poetry since World War II*, p. 83, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

'*Ariel*, published in 1965 after the poet's suicide at the age of thirty, gave many readers their first taste of unapologetic anger in a woman's poems.' Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, p. 78, (London: The Women's Press, 1987).

FOUR - IMAGES OF WATER

1 Edward Lucie-Smith, 'Sea-Imagery in the Work of Sylvia Plath', p. 92, in Charles Newman (ed), *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1970).

2 Alicia Ostriker, 'The Americanization of Sylvia', p. 102, in Linda W Wagner (ed) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*, (Boston: G K Hall, 1984).

3 Stanley Plumly, 'What Ceremony of Words' p. 14, in Paul Alexander (ed), *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985)

4 J D McClatchy, 'Staring from her Hood of Bone: Adjusting to Sylvia Plath', p. 156, in Robert B Shaw (ed), *American Poetry since 1960: Some Critical Perspectives*, (Cheadle: Carcenet Press, 1973).

5 'Death we like to define as the "inaccessibilility to experience", thus including all the varieties of death-in-

life.' Sylvia Plath, 'Some Preliminary Notes on Plato and Popper concerning *The Republic*', p. 4, dated 14 May 1956. These unpublished notes have been supplied by the Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

6 Joseph L Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', p. 142 in Carl Jung (ed), *Man and his Symbols*, (London: Pan Books, 1978).

7 Ted Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', p. 161, in Paul Alexander (ed), *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

8 Judith Kroll in *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, pp. 226-227 (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978) suggests the use of the three roles from a BBC script: 'the three women are identified not as "First Voice," "Second Voice," and "Third Voice," as they are in the British and American editions of *Winter Trees*, but as they appear in a BBC Production script (transmitted June 9, 1968). Here the "Wife" corresponds to "First Voice"; the "Secretary", to "Second Voice"; and the "Girl" to "Third Voice."'

9 For full discussion of the different aspects of the four types, see Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology*, pp. 194-211, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

10 The unpublished notes on Jung are headed 'Jung' and refer to his volume *The Development of Personality*, translated by R F C Hull, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954). This particular reference is on p. 184. The notes are dated 1962 and have been supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

11 Hughes in Alexander (*op. cit.*), p. 158.

FIVE - THE THEME OF REBIRTH I

1 Ted Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', p. 156 in Paul Alexander (ed.), *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

2 Hughes, *ibid.* p. 157.

3 Hughes, *ibid.* pp. 163-164.

4 Gordon Lameyer, 'The Double in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*' p. 144 in Edward Butscher (ed.) *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work* (London: Peter Owen, 1979).

5 Cited in Lois Ames, 'Notes Toward a Biography', p. 163 in Charles Newman (ed.) *The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970).

6 Joseph L Henderson, 'Ancient Myths and Modern Man', p. 123 in Carl Jung (ed) *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus Books, 1978).

7 See, for example, Richard Tillinghast, 'Worlds of Their Own' pp. 79-80 in Linda W Wagner (ed.) *Sylvia Plath: The Critical Heritage*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); M L Rosenthal, *The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*, p. 83 (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Arthur K Oberg, 'Sylvia Plath and the New Decadence' pp. 177-185 in Edward Butscher (ed.), *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work*, (London: Peter Owen, 1979).

8 The full definitions of these are offered in Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Volume 9, Part 1 of the Collected Works, translated by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1959), pp. 113-115.

9 Sylvia Plath, 'Some Preliminary Notes on Plato and Popper: concerning The Republic, May 14, 1956, p. 3. These unpublished notes have been supplied by the Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

10 Shelley Orgel, 'Fusion with the Victim: A Study of Sylvia Plath' p. 141, in Joseph T Coltrera (ed.) *Lives, Events and Other Players: Directions in Psychobiography*, Volume IV, Downstate Psychoanalytic Institute, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Series (New York: Jason Aronson, 1979).

11 See Judith Kroll, Chapter V, "Poem for a Birthday" and the Imagery of Metamorphosis, pp. 88-108, in *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978).

12 See Kroll, *ibid.* p. 95 for a different interpretation, that of 'the theme of the loss of her [Plath's] father in terms which often parallel the imagery of dying god and mourning goddess.'

13 The unpublished notes on Jung are headed 'Jung' and refer to his volume *The Development of Personality*, translated by R F C Hull, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954). This particular reference is p. 174. The Plath notes are dated

1962 and have been supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

14 Hughes, *op. cit.* p. 155

15 Hughes, *op. cit.* pp. 158-9

16 Jean Baker Miller offers a discussion of ego development and the inappropriateness of the 'I' of psychoanalysis in relation to women in Chapter Six of *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), pp. 60 *ff.*

17 Alicia Ostriker, 'The Americanization of Sylvia', p. 106 in Linda W Wagner (ed.) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*, (Boston: G K Hall, 1984).

18 Demaris S Wehr, *Jung & Feminism: Liberating Archetypes*, (London: Routledge, 1988). The discussion is continued and Wehr offers a critique of the Jungian way of explaining which 'always imparts a sense of cosmic approbation and very little, if any, social critique.' (pp. 114 *ff*)

SIX - THE THEME OF REBIRTH II

1 Margaret D Uroff offers a different reading in 'Sylvia Plath on Motherhood', *Midwest Quarterly*, 15 October 1973, pp. 70-90. She suggests that 'Plath focuses on the inherent impossibilities of motherhood. Protection, comfort, instruction can often prove excessive or ill-directed, however kindly offered or desperately needed.' (p. 74)

2 Shelley Orgel, 'Fusion with the Victim: A Study of Sylvia Plath' p. 149, in Joseph T Coltrera (ed), *Lives, Events and Other Players: Directions in Psychobiography*, Volume 14, Downstate Psychoanalytic Institute. Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Series (New York: Jason Aronson, 1981)

3 Ted Hughes, 'Sylvia Plath and Her Journals', p. 160, in Paul Alexander (ed), *Ariel Ascending* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

4 Hughes *ibid.*, p. 161.

5 Sylvia Plath's own notes on Jung, supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts. My research indicates that this particular reference comes from the Collected Works, Volume 17, *The Development of Personality*, translated by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 193.

6 See Aurelia Plath's discussion of this in her introduction to *Letters Home*, pp. 8-13.

7 For full discussion of all these categories, see Carl Jung, the Collected Works, Volume 9, Part 1, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959) pp. 117-134.

8 By using fish symbolism, Plath is linking biblical and alchemical symbolism. I have noted the significance of the fish in relation to Plato in Chapter Two.

9 Adrienne Rich discusses patriarchal power over others, and men's fear of women's power in *Of Woman Born* (New York: W W Norton, 1976), particularly pp. 64-73.

10 Mary Lynn Broe suggests that the 'highly organized, self-regulating hive becomes her model for conceptualizing human experience by reexamining power in its many shapes (seller, keeper, worker-drudge), or in its startling absence (queen).' Mary Lynn Broe, *Protean Poetic: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1980), p. 142.

11 Sandra M Gilbert, 'A Fine, White Flying Myth: The Life/Work of Sylvia Plath', p. 255, in Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar (eds), *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

12 Eudora Welty, a writer whom Plath read (*Journals*, p. 313) used a similar phrase, 'the eye of the red sun . . .' in *The Robber Bridegroom*, (London: Virago Press, 1982), p. 106.

13 Dylan Thomas also considered the period of his birthday significant: he wrote 'Poem in October' and 'Poem on his Birthday', pp. 95 and 155 respectively in *Collected Poems, 1934-1952*, (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1971).

14 All dates are those given in *Collected Poems*.

15 Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

16 Katherine Mansfield used the image of suitcases to represent people:

> 'I believe that people are like portmanteaux--packed with certain things, started going, thrown about, tossed away, dumped down, lost and found, half emptied suddenly, or squeezed fatter than ever, until finally the Ultimate Porter swings them on to the Ultimate Train and away they rattle. . . .' 'Je Ne Parle Pas Francais', p. 60 in *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, (London: Constable, 1945).

17 Elaine Showalter has an excellent discussion on the 'divided consciousness, the split in each of us' in 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', pp. 39-40 in Mary Jacobus (ed), *Women Writing and Writing About Women*, (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1979).

18 Barbara Antonina Clarke Mossberg, 'Sylvia Plath's Baby Book', p. 187 in Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom (eds), *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985)

19 Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall' in Christopher Dolley (ed), *The Second Penguin Book of English Short Stories*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

SEVEN - CONCLUSION

1 For discussions of the moon symbolism in Plath's work, see Judith Kroll, Chapter III, in *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), and Eileen Aird, Chapter 7, in *Sylvia Plath*, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973).

2 For discussion of the moon, see Anne Kent Rush, *Moon, Moon*, (New York & California: Random House/Moon Books, 1976). While not specifically concerned with Plath's use of the symbolism of the moon, Rush details many historic and present aspects of this powerful symbol.

3 See note 9, Chapter 6 in connection with women's power.

4 Sylvia Brinton Perera, 'The Descent of Inanna: Myth and Therapy', p. 140, in Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupprecht (eds) *Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-Visions of Jungian Thought*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

5 Guinevara A Nance and Judith P Jones, 'Doing Away with Daddy: Exorcism and Sympathetic Magic in Plath's Poetry', p. 128, in Linda W Wagner (ed) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*, (Boston: G K Hall, 1984).

6 Pamela J Amos, 'The Self in the World: The Social Context of Sylvia Plath's Late Poems', p. 139, in Linda W Wagner (ed) (*ibid.*)

7 Susan R Van Dyne, '"More Terrible Than She Ever Was": The Manuscripts of Sylvia Plath's Bee Poems', p. 164, in Linda W Wagner (ed) (*ibid.*)

8 For a discussion of this problem see Adrienne Rich, 'Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet' in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*, pp. 167-187, (London: Virago Press, 1987).

9 Margaret Homans discusses the problem of feminism and language in her concluding chapter of *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

10 Taken from page 4 of Plath's own notes on Jung, dated 1962 and supplied by the Rare Book Room, Smith College Library, Northampton, Mass. The notes themselves refer to p. 193, *The Development of Personality*, Volume 17 of the Collected Works of C G Jung, translated by R F C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).

APPENDIX 1 - THE THREE PHASES OF SYLVIA PLATH'S WORK

Ted Hughes offers, in the Introduction to the *Collected Poems*, his division of Plath's work.

'The first phase might be called her juvenilia and the first slight problem here was to decide where it ended. A logical division occurs, conveniently, at the end of 1955, just after the end of her twenty-third year. The 220 or more poems written before this are of interest mainly to specialists. Sylvia Plath had set these pieces (many of them from her early teens) firmly behind her and would certainly never have republished them herself. . . .

The greater part of these early poems survive in final typed copies; some others have been recovered from magazines, and still others, not in the typescript and not appearing in any magazine, have turned up in letters and elsewhere. Presumably there may be more, still hidden. The chronological order of the work of this period is often impossible to determine, except in the broadest outlines. A date can sometimes be fixed from a letter or from the date of magazine publication, but she occasionally took poems up again--sometimes years later--and reworked them. . . .

The second phase of Sylvia Plath's writing falls between early 1956 and late 1960. Early 1956 presents itself as a watershed, because from later this year come the earliest poems of her first collection, *The Colossus*. And from this time I worked closely with her and watched the poems being written, so I am reasonably sure that everything is here. Searching over the years, we have failed to unearth any others. Final typescripts exist for all of them. The chronological order, also, is less in doubt here, though the problem does still linger. . . .

The third and final phase of her work, from the editorial point of view, dates from about September 1960. Around that time, she started the habit of dating the final typescript of each poem. On the two or three occasions when she modified a poem later, she dated the revision as well. . . . So throughout this period the calendar sequence is correct, and the only occasional doubt concerns the order of composition among poems written on the same day.'

Extracted from *Collected Poems*, pp. 15-17

APPENDIX 2 - COMPOSITION ORDER OF POEMS IN *THE COLOSSUS*

1956	'Two Sisters of Persephone'	p. 63
	'Strumpet Song'	51
	'Faun'	18
	'Spinster'	68
	'Departure'	19
	'Maudlin'	48
	'Black Rook in Rainy Weather'	42
1957	'Sow'	12
	'Hardcastle Crags'	16
	'The Thin People'	30
	'All the Dead Dears'	27
	'The Disquieting Muses'	58
	'Night Shift'	11
	'Ouija'	52
	'Snakecharmer'	55
1958	'Lorelei'	22
	'I Want, I Want'	36
	'The Ghost's Leavetaking'	39
	'Full Fathom Five'	46
	'The Companionable Ills'	64
	'Moonrise'	66
	'Frog Autumn'	70
	'Mussel Hunter at Rock Harbour'	71
	'The Times are Tidy'	76
	'Sculptor'	79
1959	'The Bull of Bendylaw'	26
	'The Eye-Mote'	14
	'Point Shirley'	24
	'Watercolour of Grantchester Meadows	37
	'A Winter Ship'	44
	'Aftermath'	29
	'Two Views of a Cadaver Room'	10
	'Suicide Off Egg Rock'	33
	'Metaphors'	41
	'The Beekeeper's Daughter'	75
	'The Hermit at Outermost House'	57
	'Man in Black'	54
	'Medallion'	61
	'The Manor Garden'	9
	'Blue Moles'	49
	'The Colossus'	20
	'Poem for a Birthday'	80
	'The Burnt-Out Spa'	77
	'Mushrooms'	34

Compiled from *Collected Poems*

APPENDIX 3 - THE ORDERING OF *ARIEL*

Plath's order		Hughes' order
1	'Morning Song'	1
2	'The Couriers'	2
3	'The Rabbit Catcher'	omitted/WT*
4	'Thalidomide'	omitted/WT
5	'The Applicant'	4
6	'Barren Woman'	omitted/CW**
7	'Lady Lazarus'	5
8	'Tulips'	6
9	'A Secret'	omitted
10	'The Jailer'	omitted
11	'Cut'	7
12	'Elm'	8
13	'Night Dances'	9
14	'The Detective'	omitted
15	'Ariel'	12
16	'Death & Co.'	13
17	'Magi'	omitted/CW
18	'Lesbos'	omitted/WT
19	'The Other'	omitted/WT
20	'Stopped Dead'	omitted/WT
21	'Poppies in October'	10
22	'The Courage of Shutting Up'	omitted/WT
23	'Nick and the Candlestick'	14
24	'Berck-Plage'	11
25	'Gulliver'	15
26	'Getting There'	16
27	'Medusa'	17
28	'Purdah'	omitted/WT
29	'The Moon and the Yew Tree'	18
30	'A Birthday Present'	19
31	'Letter in November'	20
32	'Amnesiac'	omitted
33	'The Rival'	21
34	'Daddy'	22
35	'You're'	23
36	'Fever 103°'	24
37	'The Bee Meeting'	25
38	'The Arrival of the Bee Box'	26
39	'Stings'	27
40	'The Swarm'	omitted/WT
41	'Wintering'	28

* WT — omitted from *Ariel* but subsequently published in *Winter Trees*

** CW — omitted from *Ariel* but subsequently published in *Crossing the Water*

Compiled from *Collected Poems*, p. 296

APPENDIX 4 - COMPOSITION ORDER OF POEMS IN *ARIEL*

1960	'You're'
	'Magi'
1961	'Morning Song'
	'Barren Woman'
	'Tulips'
	'The Rival'
	'The Moon and the Yew Tree'
1962	'Elm'
	'The Rabbit Catcher'
	'Berck-Plage'
	'The Other'
	'A Birthday Present'
	'The Detective'
	'The Courage of Shutting-Up'
	'The Bee Meeting'
	'The Arrival of the Bee Box'
	'Stings'
	'The Swarm'
	'Wintering'
	'A Secret'
	'The Applicant'
	'Daddy'
	'Medusa'
	'The Jailer'
	'Lesbos'
	'Stopped Dead'
	'Fever 103°'
	'Amnesiac'
	'Cut'
	'Ariel'
	'Poppies in October'
	'Nick and the Candlestick'
	'Purdah'
	'Lady Lazarus'
	'The Couriers'
	'Getting There'
	'Night Dances'
	'Gulliver'
	'Thalidomide'
	'Letter in November'
	'Death & Co.'

Compiled from *Collected Poems*

APPENDIX 5 - THE FINAL POEMS - 1963

Plath's order of composition	Hughes' order in *Ariel*
'Sheep in Fog'	3
'The Munich Mannequins'	32
'Totem'	33
'Child'	omitted
'Paralytic'	34
'Gigolo'	omitted/WT*
'Mystic'	omitted/WT
'Kindness'	37
'Words'	40
'Contusion'	38
'Balloons'	35
'Edge'	39

* WTomitted from *Ariel* but subsequently published in *Winter Trees*

Hughes included three poems which Plath had excluded from her own version of *Ariel*:

'The Hanging Man'	(June 1960)
'Little Fugue	(April 1962)
'Years'	(November 1962)

Compiled from *Collected Poems* and *Ariel*

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